

The Importance of Incorporating Nutrition Education in the School Curriculum



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Acknowledgements

As the CEO and Co-founder of the Nourishing Schools Programme, it is my privilege to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the development and dissemination of this report. This document represents the culmination of extensive research and dedication while embodying our collective commitment to addressing the critical challenge of malnutrition in India, particularly among our most vulnerable populations.

Firstly, I express my deepest appreciation to our dedicated team at the Nourishing Schools Programme. Your tireless efforts, innovative thinking, and relentless pursuit of excellence have been instrumental in bringing our vision to life. Through your work, we are not just educating; we are empowering a new generation of changemakers equipped to tackle nutritional challenges head-on.

I extend my sincere thanks to our civil society partners who have provided invaluable insights, support, and resources, such as Farm2Food Foundation, Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti, URMUL Trust and Vaagdhara. Your collaboration has been crucial in broadening our impact and enhancing the quality of our interventions. The synergy between our organizations demonstrates the power of collective action in driving meaningful change.

Our gratitude goes out to the academic and research communities whose work has significantly informed our approach and strategies. Your research has shed light on the interconnectedness of stunting, undernutrition, and the critical importance of targeting adolescents and preadolescents. This evidence base has been essential in shaping our programmes and advocacy efforts.

I must acknowledge the unwavering support of the schools, educators, and communities that have embraced our programme. Your commitment to nurturing the health and well-being of your students has been inspiring. Through your partnership, we have been able to reach and positively impact the lives of 95,000 schoolchildren across 330+ schools in India.

To the children and adolescents who have participated in our programme, you are the heart of our mission. Your enthusiasm, creativity, and willingness to lead change in your communities give us hope for a healthier future. Your success stories and achievements reinforce the importance of our work and motivate us to continue our efforts with even greater vigour.

Special thanks to our donors and supporters, such as BW Global United LPG India Pvt. Ltd., Great Eastern CSR Foundation, Impact Foundation India (Dasra), NASSCOM Foundation, DSM Nutritional Products India Pvt. Ltd. and Swiss Re Foundation, for believing in our mission and enabling us to expand our reach and deepen our impact. Your generosity and commitment to social change are invaluable to our ongoing success.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to Niiti Consulting, who co-authored this report with us. Their expertise and insights have been instrumental in shaping the analysis and recommendations presented.

This report is a testament to what we can achieve when we unite for a common purpose. As we move forward, let us continue to work together to nurture and empower our young changemakers, paving the way for a healthier, more nourished future.

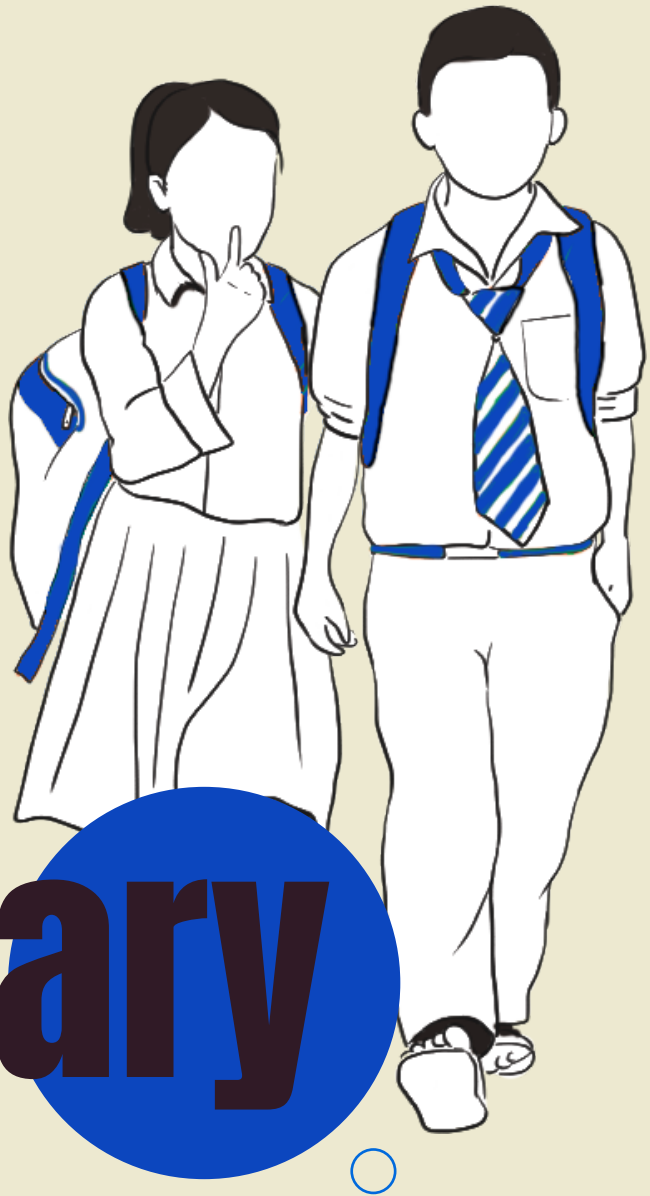
With deepest gratitude,

Archana Sinha
CEO and Co-founder
Nourishing Schools Programme

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01. Executive Summary



In the WHO South-East Asia Region, despite progress in health and education, malnutrition remains a critical challenge.

With **60 Million** stunted children &



8.8 Million overweight in the age group 0–5 years,



The economic cost of malnutrition ranges from 2 to 3 percent of a country's GDP. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 2 : Zero Hunger aims to eradicate hunger from the world by 2030 and eliminate malnutrition. However, as per the UN's own estimation based on progress reports, we are likely to miss the target.

India, with 194.4 million undernourished people, faces substantial health and socioeconomic costs. Addressing the root cause of malnutrition requires focusing on adolescents to improve nutrition awareness and prevent future problems. Boasting a staggering 253 million adolescents, comprising 120 million girls and 133 million boys, India stands as the global leader in the adolescent population. This demographic cohort is a critical asset and plays a pivotal role in shaping the nation's future.

As the economic trajectory of India is intricately linked to the well-being and development of its adolescents, nurturing this demographic advantage becomes paramount for sustained growth and prosperity.

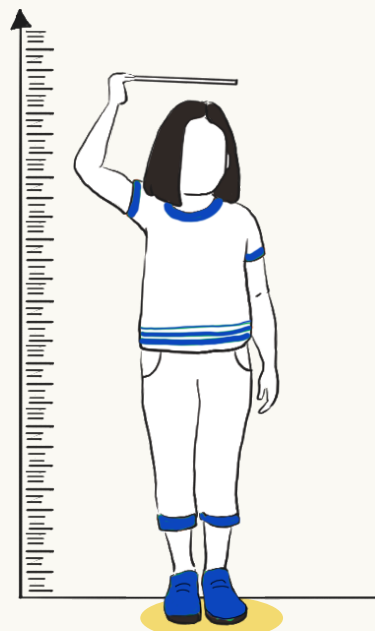


Adolescent
Nutrition

Summary of Key Findings

Interconnectedness of Stunting and Undernutrition:

- Stunting in children is linked to undernutrition in mothers, emphasizing the need to target adolescents as "future parents."
- The 1000-day window approach may not be sufficient; addressing pre-pregnancy anaemia is crucial to reduce the risk of low-birth weight or preterm babies.

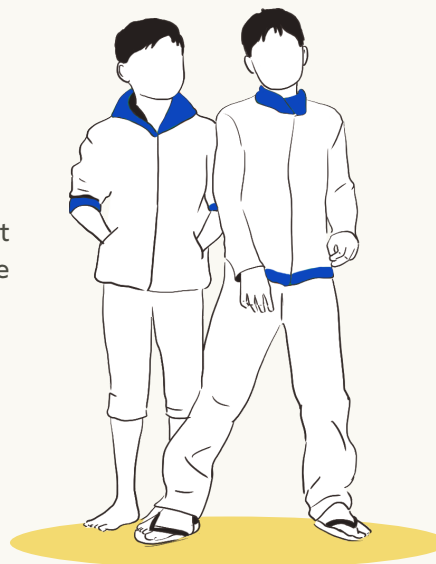


Urgent Need for Holistic Interventions:

- An enabling environment within health, education, and other sectors is crucial for effective nutrition interventions.
- Adolescents and preadolescents, often overlooked, should be key target groups alongside women and young children.

Lack of Focus on Adolescent Health:

- Adolescent groups lack attention in government and corporate social responsibility programmes due to insufficient data on their health and well-being.



The transmission of undernutrition from mothers to children highlights the complex nature of the problem. The focus on adolescent girls is particularly highlighted as critical for breaking India's intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. Targeting this demographic group before they become mothers aligns with the idea of early interventions to shape lifelong health habits.

The emphasis on schools as a cross-sectoral platform to address good nutrition in the context of the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) data is significant. The release of the CNNS report by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, in 2019 provides valuable insights into macronutrient and micronutrient malnutrition, dietary habits, life skill behaviours, access to services, and physical activity throughout adolescence (10-19 years) for both boys and girls. The potential of schools as a platform to address not only diets but also services and behaviours is stressed, suggesting a holistic approach to nutrition within the educational system.

“ Schools play a crucial role in fostering healthy eating habits and overall well-being in children. By partnering with governments to prioritize nutrition education, we empower individuals to make positive changes that can last a lifetime. ”

- CEO and Co-founder of Nourishing Schools, **Archana Sinha**

The Nourishing Schools Programme in India aims to create young change makers who are in charge of their nutrition and can improve their own nutritional status as well as that of their communities.

Targeting Critical Developmental Period -

The programme addresses a nutrition gap,

focusing on children in the age group of 9-14 years,

which is a critical developmental period for instilling values and habits that can last a lifetime.

Proven Track Record

The programme has influenced

95,000
school children



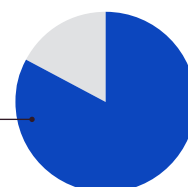
across 330+ schools in 4 states, using a 6-component toolkit that includes fun-based interactive activities, fostering a sense of responsibility and community service.

Empowering Young Changemakers -

Surveys conducted by Nourishing Schools show that



83% of Children



who participated in the programme across 150 schools in India exhibited the confidence to take charge of their nutritional health and influence their communities.

By leveraging our data and corroborating it with insights from reputable sources, we intend to present a comprehensive view of the malnutrition landscape, emphasising the urgency of fostering proactive engagement among children.



“ Nutrition is the cornerstone of a child’s development, influencing not just their physical health, but also their cognitive abilities and overall well-being. As CSR partners, it’s crucial that we prioritize initiatives that promote access to nutritious foods and education on healthy eating habits for children. By investing in their nutrition today, we’re nurturing healthier and brighter futures for generations to come. ”

- **Unnikrishnan T S**, Head - Corporate Social Responsibility, Great Eastern CSR Foundation

02.

Introduction



The "*Triple Burden of Malnutrition*" comprises three types of nutritional challenges - undernutrition (stunting and wasting), overnutrition (overweight and obesity) and micronutrient deficiencies (often termed as hidden hunger) that coexist in individuals, households and populations.

Most countries in the South-East Asia Region (SEAR) are now experiencing a triple burden of malnutrition. This nutrition crisis that countries are facing is a result of the broader malfunctioning of our global food system. Interconnected issues like resilience of food supply chains, reduction of food loss and waste, mitigation of economic crises and conflicts and promotion of affordable and nutritious food options to all income groups need to be addressed with a coordinated action at all levels - local, national and international. Countries need to tackle these challenges comprehensively involving governments, NGOs, the private sector and communities.

Malnutrition has a multifaceted impact on children's health and well-being, encompassing physical, cognitive and economic aspects of life. Some of the key impacts are:



Growth and Development

- Malnourished children may fail to reach their optimum potential in terms of physical growth and overall development.
- Stunting during childhood, as indicated by a World Bank report, can lead to a permanent loss of height among adults, potentially impacting economic productivity.



Education and School Performance

- Malnourished children tend to exhibit higher rates of school absenteeism, which can result in poor academic performance.
- Impairment associated with malnutrition may hinder a child's ability to learn and perform well in school.



Economic Productivity

- The long-term consequences of childhood malnutrition, including stunting, can have economic ramifications, reducing adult height and, consequently, economic productivity.



Health Risks and Infectious Diseases

- Malnourished children are more vulnerable to infectious diseases such as diarrhoea, measles, malaria, and pneumonia.
- The increased risk of these diseases can further contribute to absenteeism and hinder overall well-being.



Micronutrient Deficiencies

- Micronutrient deficiencies can lead to poor health and hinder proper development in children.
- Adequate intake of essential vitamins and minerals is crucial for various physiological functions, including cognitive development and immune system support.



Overweight and Obesity

- Malnutrition encompasses both undernutrition and overnutrition, with overweight and obesity posing significant health risks.
- Diet-related non-communicable diseases, including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and cancer, are associated with overweight and obesity.



The Triple Burden

of malnutrition in East Asia and the Pacific

Causes of undernutrition

- Poverty and inequality
- Social cultural factors
- Poor water quality
- Poor sanitation and hygiene
- Maternal nutrition
- Poor diets

In East Asia and the Pacific,

21 million

children under 5 are stunted,

6 million

children under 5 are wasted

Undernutrition

Micronutrient deficiencies

In East Asia and the Pacific,



46 %

children under 5
are micronutrient
deficient



27 %

women of
reproductive
age are anaemic

Overweight and Obesity



12 million

children under 5 are overweight or obese

The Triple Burden can exist at the individual, household, or country level



Individual

Children can be stunted, overweight, and micronutrient deficient at the same time



Household

A household can have a mother who is anaemic and overweight, and a very young child who is wasted and stunted



Country

A country can have overlapping burdens of undernutrition, overweight, and micronutrient deficiencies

The Triple Burden Of Malnutrition

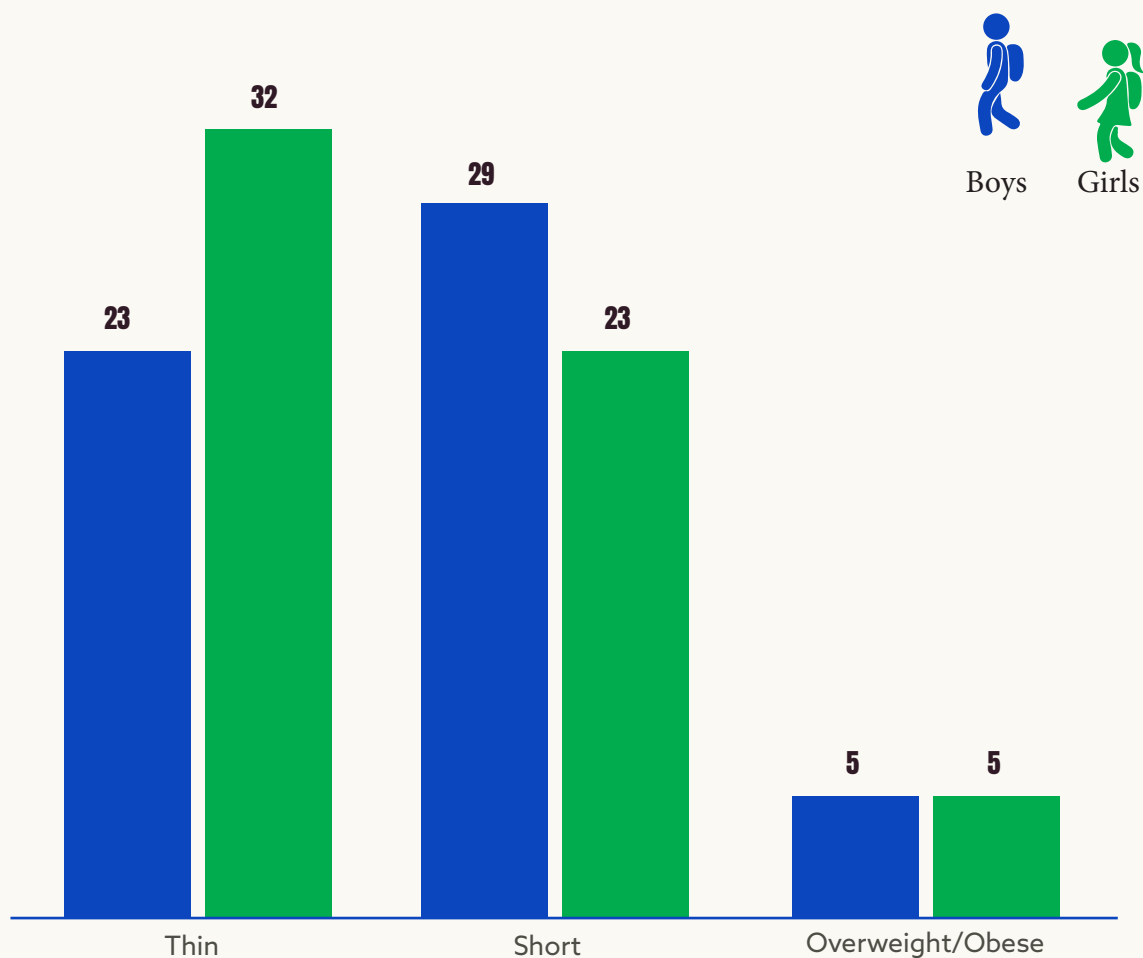


Figure 1: Prevalence of visible forms of malnutrition in adolescents aged 10 to 14 years (%)

Identifying the causes of malnutrition, particularly nutrient deficiencies, is a crucial step toward effective intervention. The list of causes, including poverty, maternal health illiteracy, frequent diseases like diarrhoea, home environment, dietary practices, and hygiene practices, provides a multifaceted view of the challenges.

Establishing the need for proactive measures through hands-on nutrition education is a key insight. This suggests that addressing malnutrition requires not only providing access to nutritious food

but also empowering communities with knowledge and skills to make informed nutritional choices.

This information underscores the importance of a holistic and well-monitored approach to nutrition programmes, ensuring not only the provision of food but also the quality, monitoring, and utilization of funds. A shift toward hands-on nutrition education is a proactive step in breaking the cycle of undernutrition and fostering healthier generations in India.



“ India has achieved remarkable strides in the battle against malnutrition, particularly in safeguarding the health of children and women, thanks to decades of dedicated policy initiatives. As we zero in on our national aspiration to eliminate malnutrition within the coming decade, we must harness our collective resolve. ”

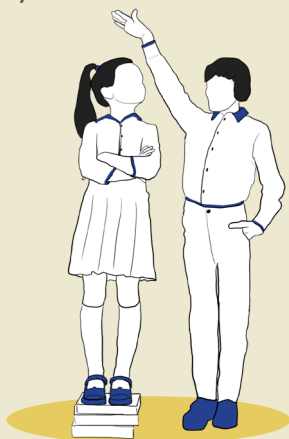
- **Dr K Madan Gopal**, Former Senior Consultant, NITI Aayog, Government of India

03.

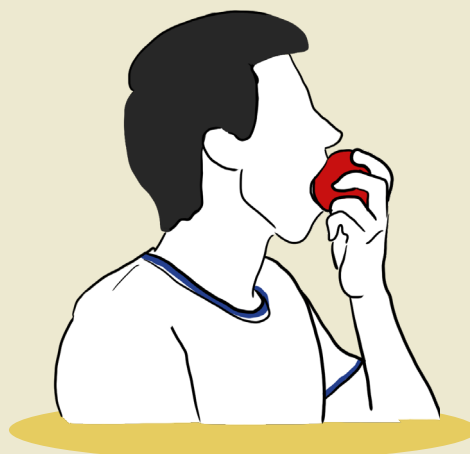
Current Landscape of Malnutrition



Every second Indian adolescent is either too short or too thin or overweight/obese. Girls are shorter than boys, but boys are thinner than girls. Thinness is highest in 10-12 year olds, with vast in-state variations among 10-14 year olds and 15-19 year olds



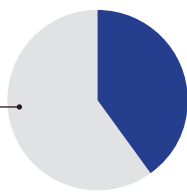
One in two adolescents suffer from at least two of the six micronutrient deficiencies (iron, folate, vitamin B12, vitamin D, vitamin A and zinc)



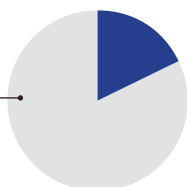
Anemia affects



40% adolescent girls



18% adolescent boys



Co-existence of anemia and thinness is higher among girls and 15-19 year olds

Diabetes and cardiovascular diseases

risk and hypertension among adolescents is increasing. At least 1 in 2 adolescents are affected by at least one of these risks.

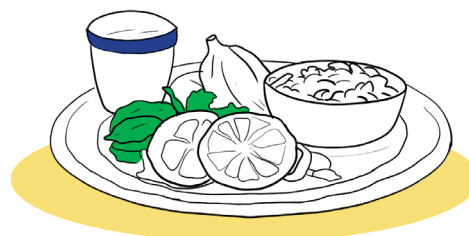


Almost all adolescents have

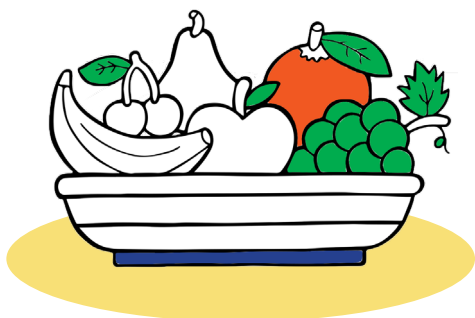
Unhealthy diets



Malnutrition in several forms is higher and/ or peaks in early adolescence



Almost all adolescents fail to meet the daily requirements of physical activity for their age

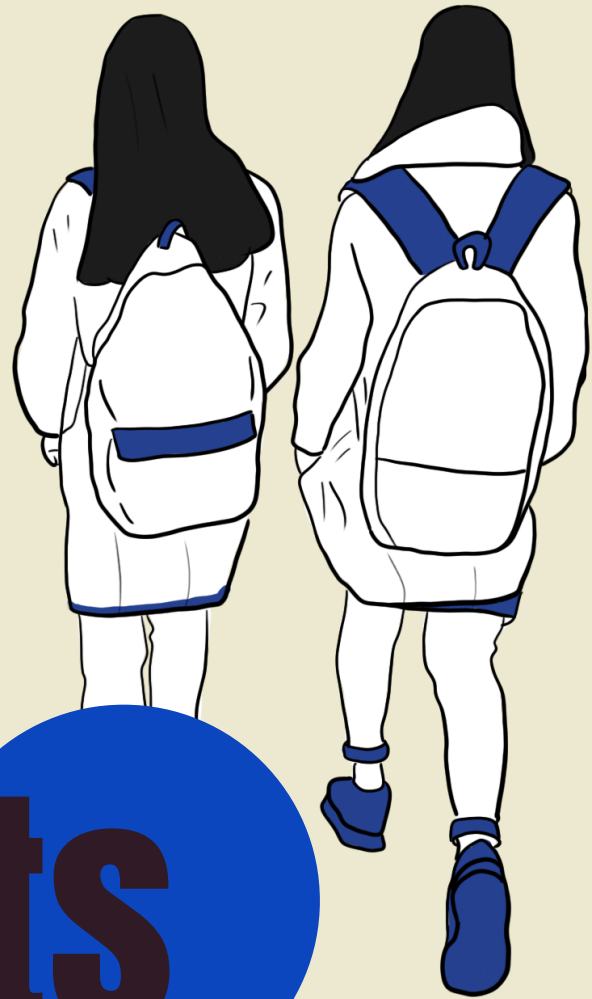


School-based services (IFA supplementation, deworming and biannual health checkups) co-coverage is low and variable across states

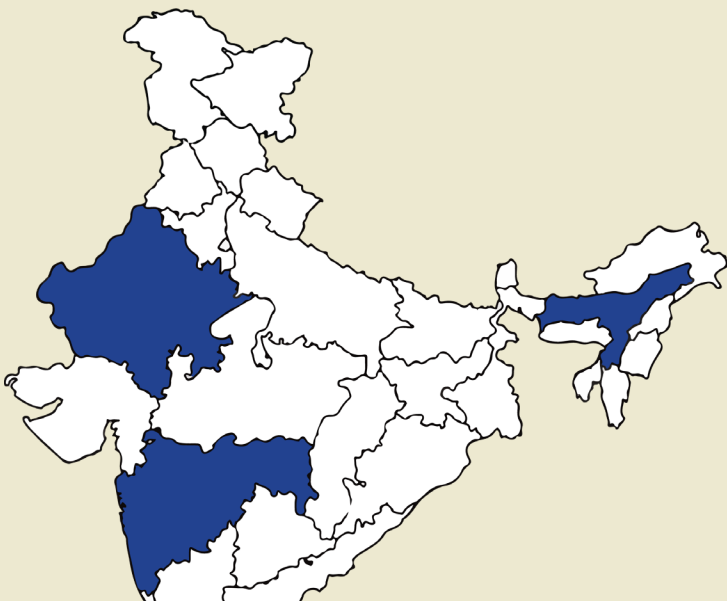


04.

Our Data Insights



The Nourishing Schools Foundation has conducted several surveys across states like Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Assam to gain valuable insights into the gaps in tackling malnutrition in India. Some of the findings related to malnutrition among school children are highlighted below.



Nutritional Status

The baseline survey results in the states of Assam, Maharashtra and Rajasthan show that one-fourth of schoolchildren are thin or severely thin.

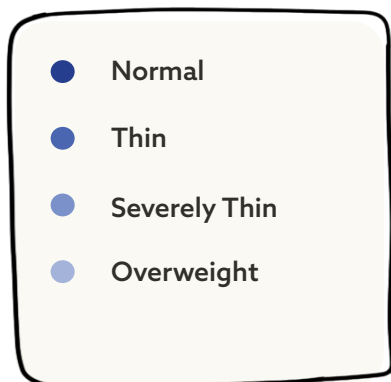


In addition, about one in twenty children is obese or overweight.

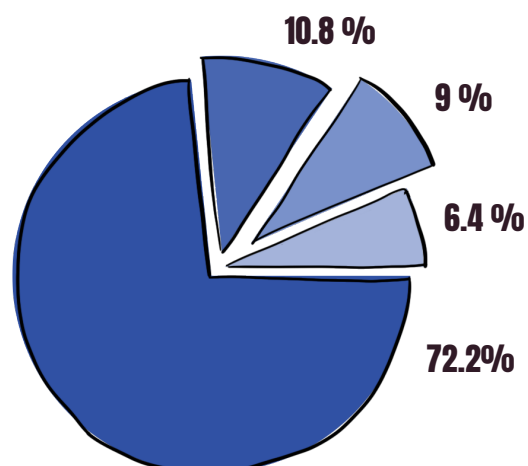
The baseline survey results in the states of Assam, Maharashtra and Rajasthan show that approximately

3/4 of school children

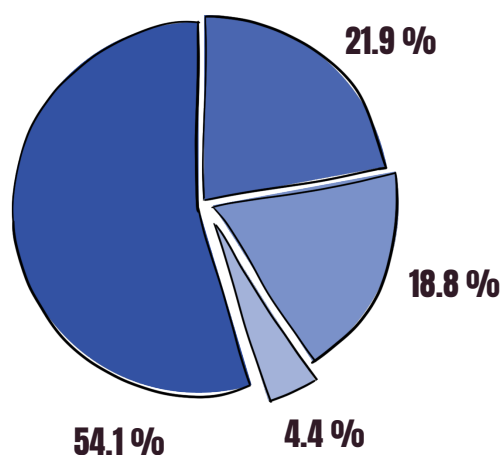
are mildly, moderately or severely anaemic.



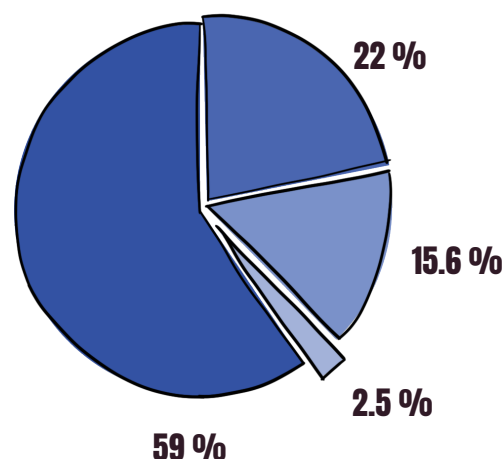
Assam



Maharashtra



Rajasthan



In India, anaemia affects almost

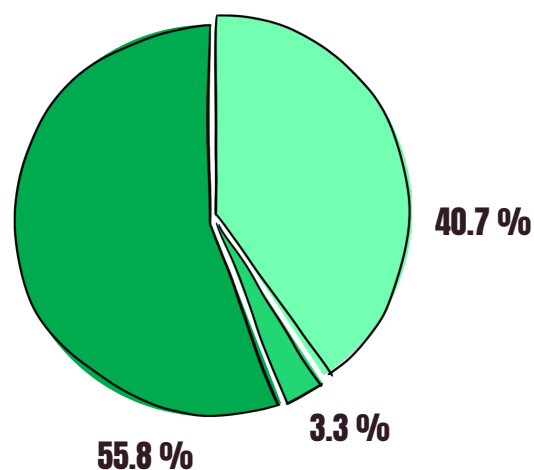
50 to 60 percent

of the population, while vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency have reduced over the years. One in two adolescents suffers from at least

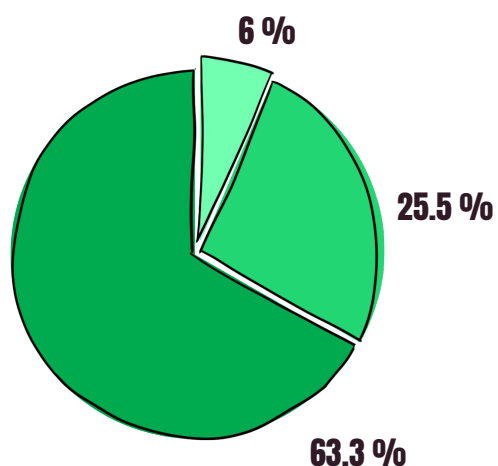


two of the six micronutrient deficiencies (iron, folate, vitamin B12, vitamin D, vitamin A, and zinc).

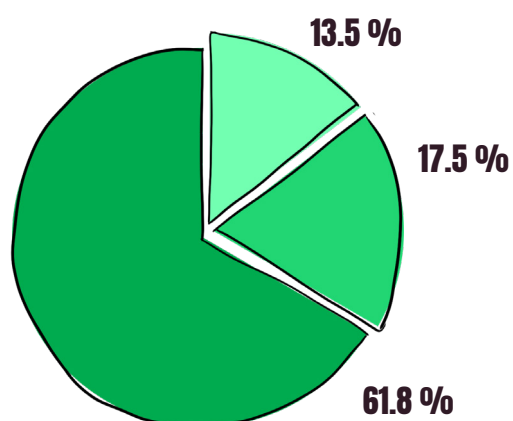
Assam



Maharashtra



Rajasthan



- Moderate
- Non-Anaemic
- Severe

Dietary Habits

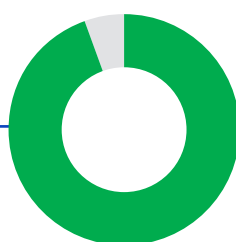
A snapshot of children's diet in Maharashtra and Rajasthan

Fruit Consumption



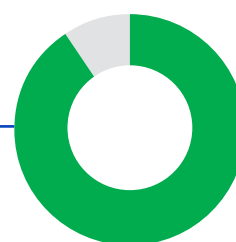
Yes

94.5%



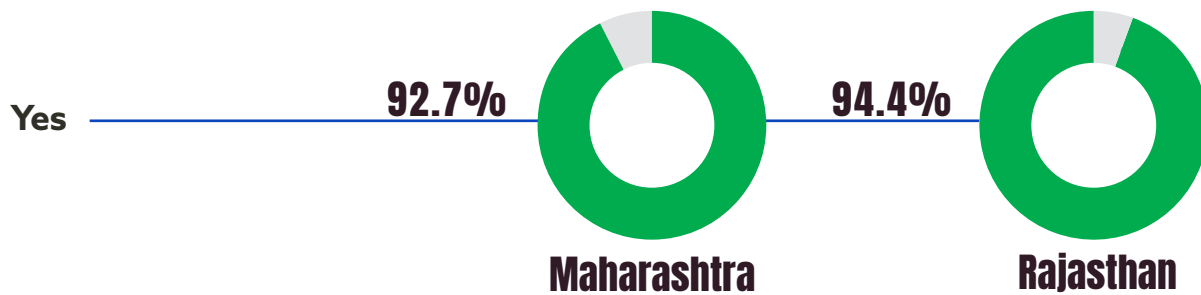
Maharashtra

90.6%

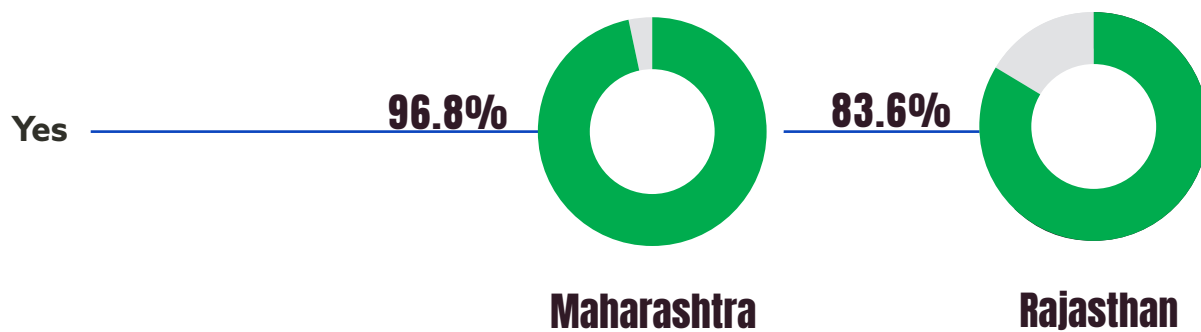


Rajasthan

Vegetable Consumption



Milk Consumption



A majority of children in Maharashtra and Rajasthan consume fruits, vegetables, and milk.

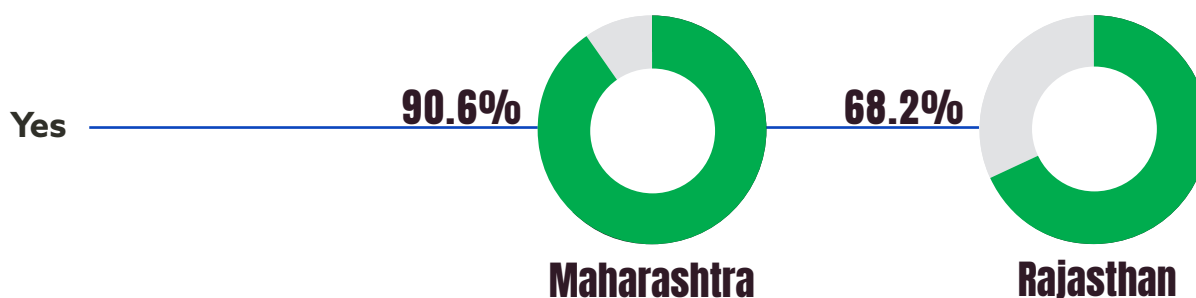
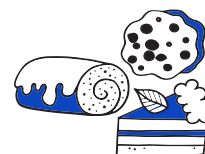
“ A strong nation must have strong human capital. Much has been said about India’s demographic dividend, that 67.3% of our population is between 15-59 years of age, and that this demographic advantage will continue for another three decades. Students constitute our present and future demographic dividend and can become critical agents of change. They must be nurtured into becoming India’s strong human capital, especially those from less privileged sections of society. ”

- **Ms. S. Veena Rao**, Director of Auro Centre for Public Health, Public Nutrition, Public Policy, Bangalore, and Former Advisor, Karnataka Nutrition Mission, Government of Karnataka

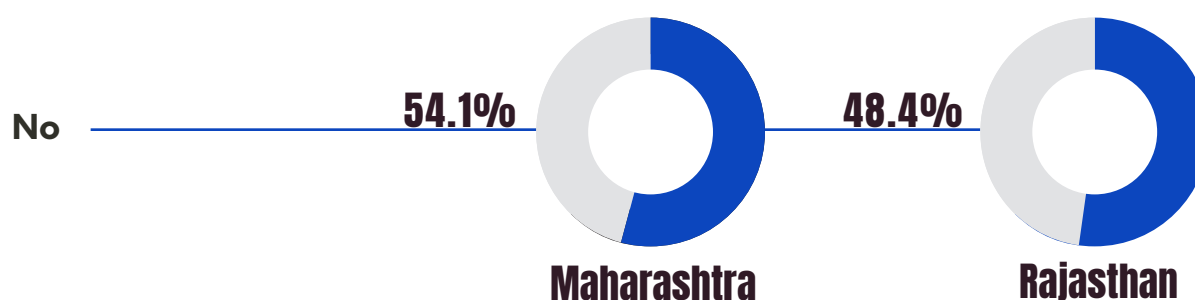
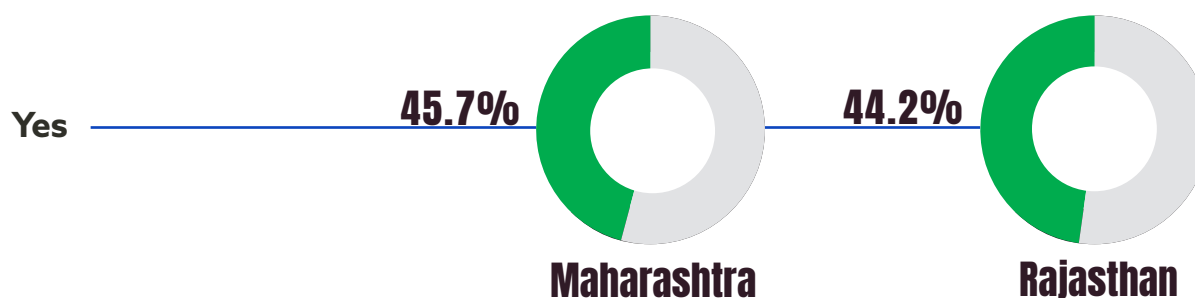
Snacks Consumption (Pizza, Cola, Sweets, Bakery Items)

A snapshot of children's consumption of unhealthy foods in Maharashtra and Rajasthan

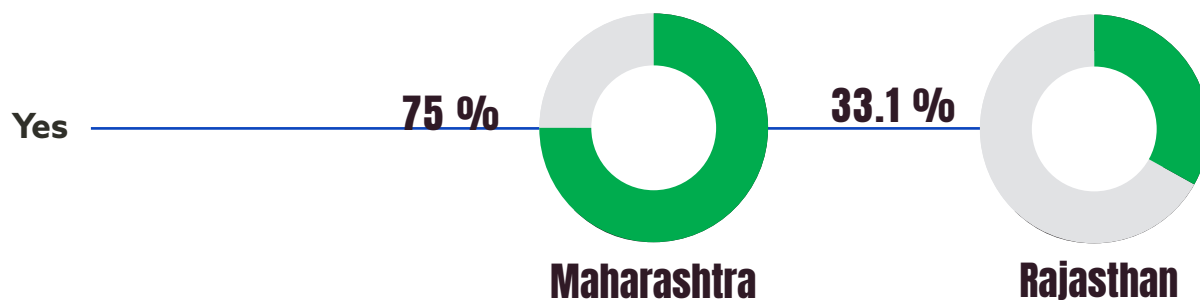
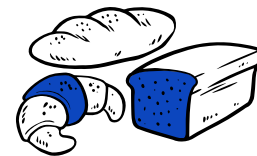
Sweets Consumption



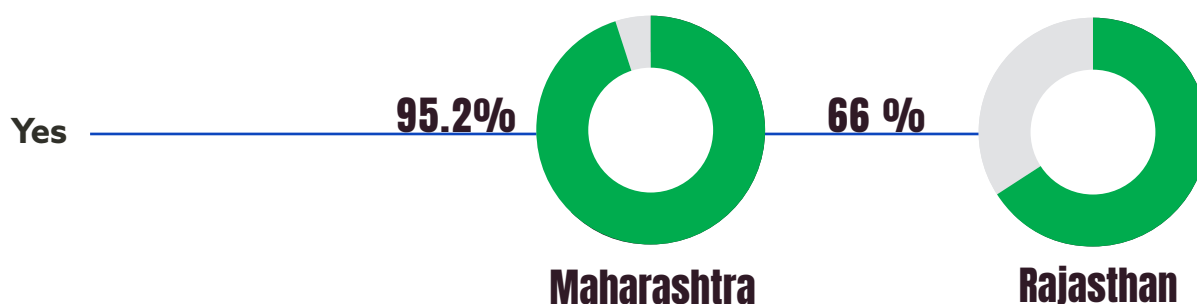
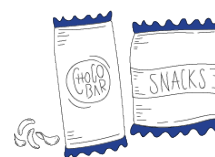
Cola Consumption



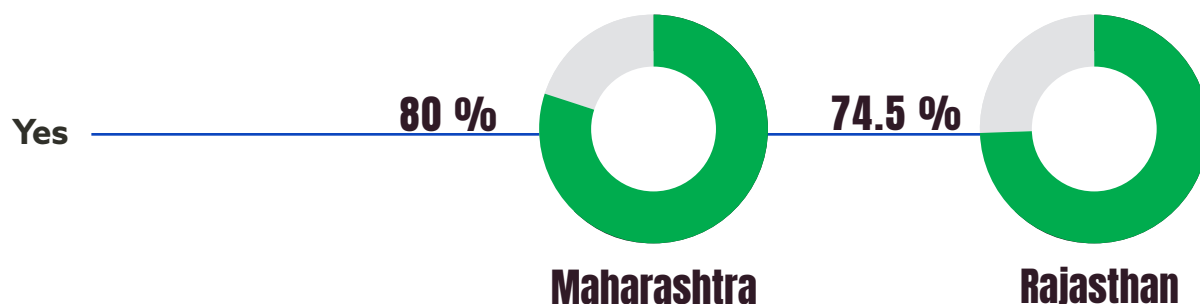
Bakery Items consumption



Chips Consumption



Fast food Consumption

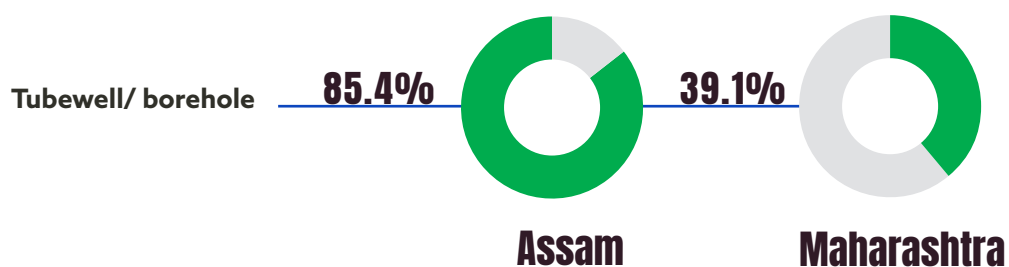


The consumption of unhealthy foods amongst children is alarmingly high with 90.55% of children in Maharashtra consuming sweets frequently, and 95.18% of children consuming chips.

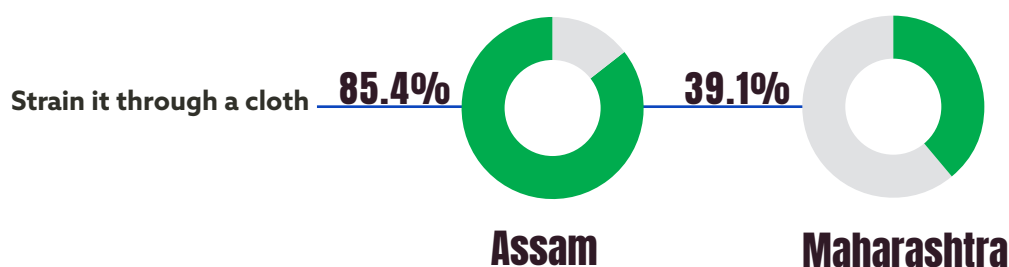
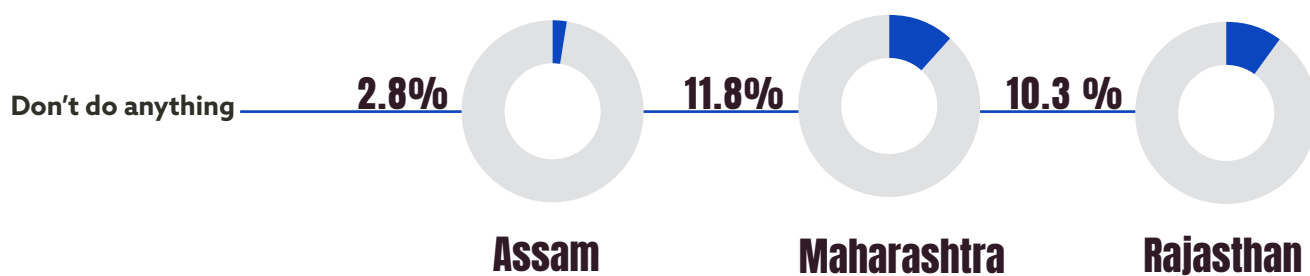
Regular and excess consumption of foods high in fat, sugar and salt leads to obesity. It is a risk factor for diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and other non-communicable diseases

Hygiene Habits

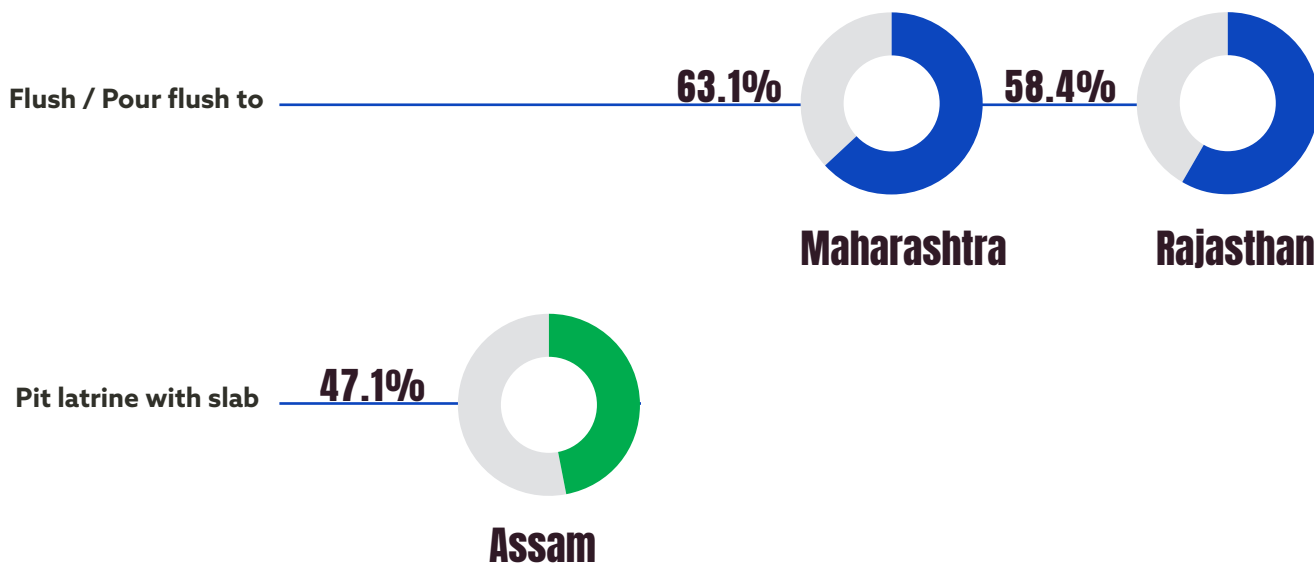
Main source of drinking water



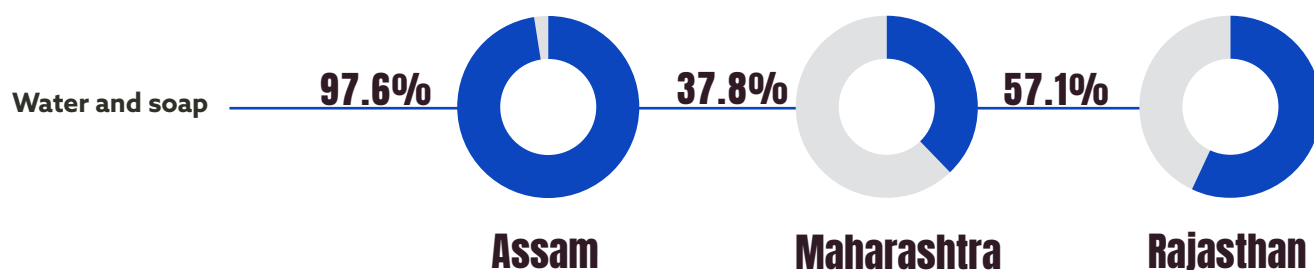
Methods adopted for making water safe for drinking



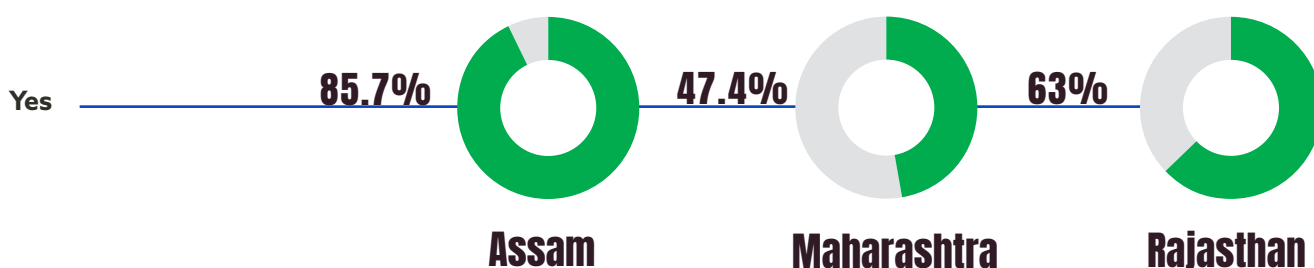
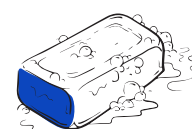
Toilet Types



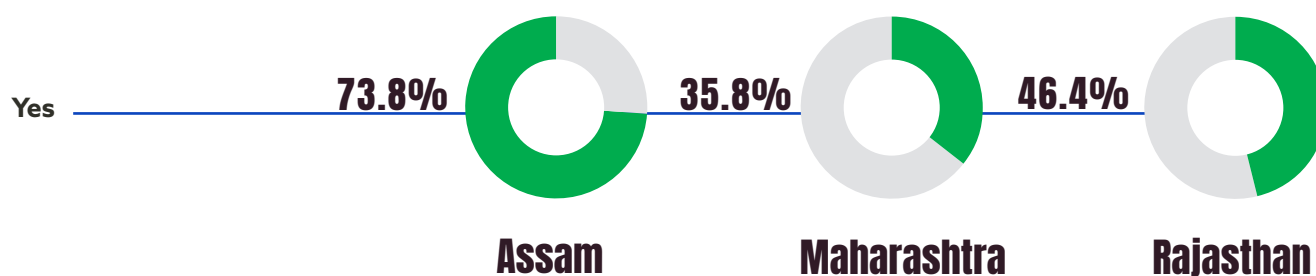
Handwashing Method in school



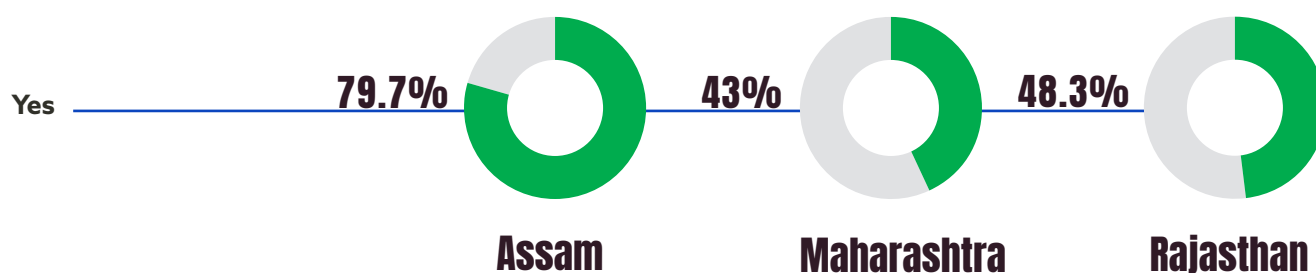
Soap availability in school



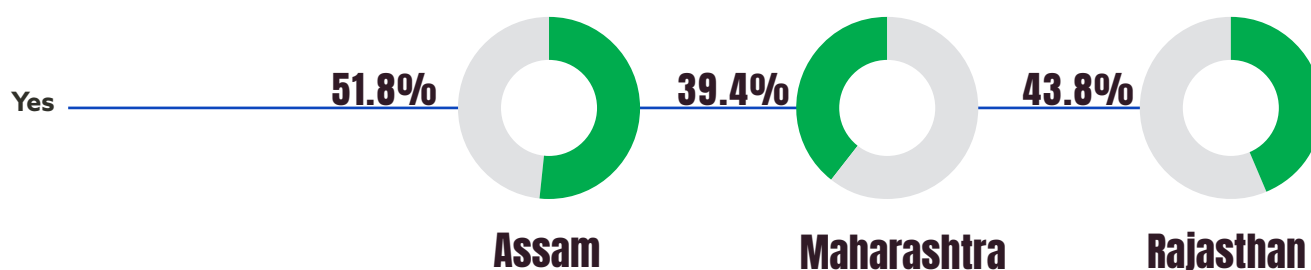
Handwashing practice before cooking



Handwashing practice before eating

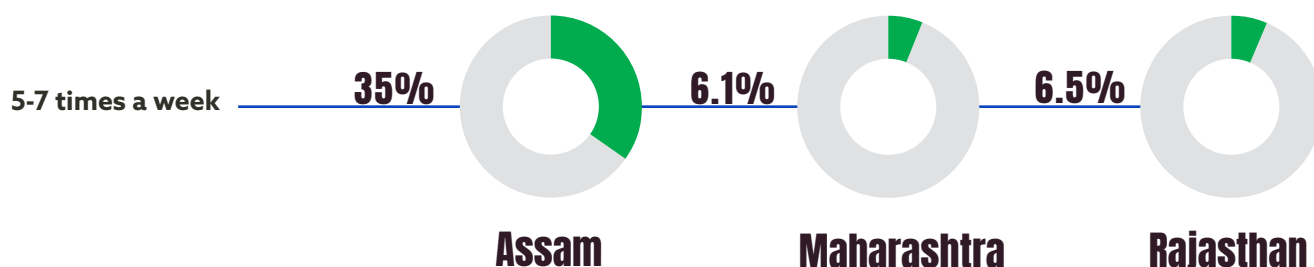


Handwashing practice after toilet use



Physical Activity

Outdoor Activities



Some of the key points and observations that emerged out of our primary and secondary research efforts were:

● Lack of awareness

Lack of nutritional knowledge significantly impedes the proper consumption of nutrient-dense meals. According to the Nutrition Awareness Index (2023) conducted by Right to Protein, about

85% of Indians are unaware

of vegetarian sources of protein, while over

54% of Indians are unaware

of the concept of healthy fats.

Without awareness of vegetarian food sources, school menus may not effectively cater to vegetarian students. This limitation can result in reduced options for vegetarian students, potentially leading to inadequate variety in their diet.

● Extended Focus Beyond the 1,000-Day Window

Insight from the research suggests that while the

1,000-day window is crucial

for nutritious feeding, targeting pre and early adolescent years is equally important. This aims to shape lifelong habits, especially considering the influence of young girls who will later become mothers.

● School-based Programmes

Piloting the programme in schools allowed for the identification of challenges related to Food & Nutrition, Sanitation & Hygiene, and Agriculture. This indicates the recognition of schools as potential platforms for effective interventions.

The challenges identified through primary and secondary research contributed to the development of the Nourishing Schools Foundation toolkit which is focused on Food & Nutrition, Sanitation & Hygiene, and Agriculture. Our research efforts have not only identified specific challenges in tackling malnutrition but have also informed a comprehensive toolkit and strategy that addresses these challenges at various levels, from individual knowledge and practices to broader community-based interventions. This approach has the potential to create a lasting impact on nutrition and well-being in the targeted regions.

05.



Empowering Children:

The Case for Hands On Nutrition Education



There's an old saying that we are what we eat and the impact of nutrition on both brain function and physical health cannot be overemphasized. A child who consumes a diet rich in nutritious foods is more likely to exhibit positive behaviour and successful interactions with others.

By providing children with balanced nutrition, we can support their cognitive development, emotional well-being, and social skills. However, while making nutritious food available to children is important, empowering them, especially pre-teens and teenagers to make the right food choices is equally crucial.

Presently, there are few structured interventions to educate children and adolescents about the impact of diet and lifestyle on their health and well-being. To address this lack of structured interventions focused on schoolchildren, the Nourishing Schools Foundation initiated a comprehensive programme that is tackling childhood malnutrition by promoting hands-on nutrition education in schools.

It provides a toolkit to schools to help catalyse change. The target group for this is children from 4th to 9th grade, referred to as "future parents" as

the Foundation takes the long-term approach to tackle malnutrition. The toolkit has 3 components - Food & Nutrition, Sanitation & Hygiene and Agriculture, using a potentially effective strategy for improving childhood nutrition outcomes by addressing various aspects of nutrition.

“When addressing adolescent nutrition, it's essential to gauge their preferred learning approach: traditional instruction or experiential learning? Our engaging interactive programme prioritizes understanding data as the foundation. Additionally, we advocate for a mindset shift to include pre-adolescents, recognizing their intelligence and capacity to grasp concepts like food labelling. Rather than textbook lessons, we emphasize practical, hands-on learning experiences to instil lifelong healthy habits.”

- Dr. Smriti Pahwa, Regional Director,
Arogya World

Kids' Healthy Eating Plate



Water



Milk

Having covered

Over 330+ government schools & over 95,000 school children

between 2015 and 2022 in Rajasthan, Assam, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry, the Nourishing Schools Foundation uses the following strategies as outlined in the programme:

1. Data

Gathering and analyzing data related to nutrition in schools and communities to identify areas of need and measure the effectiveness of interventions.

4. Content

Providing engaging and informative content on nutrition through various mediums, such as games, storytelling, and interactive activities, helps reinforce learning and behaviour change.

2. Curriculum

Integrating nutrition education into the academic curriculum ensures that children receive formal instruction on topics such as nutrients, cooking techniques, and making informed food choices.

5. Mid Day Meals

Partnering with mid-day meal programmes to improve the nutritional quality, hygiene, and food safety standards of meals served in schools ensures that children receive nourishing food during the school day.

3. Design

Designing school environments and infrastructure to support healthy eating habits, such as creating space for school gardens or upgrading kitchen facilities.

6. Community

Encouraging community participation through initiatives like farmer groups fosters collaboration and collective action to promote positive food habits and address issues related to nutrition at the community level.

The Impact

The Nourishing Schools Foundation's approach to nutrition education is both innovative and impactful. By providing schools with a comprehensive toolkit that includes curriculum, games, and activities, they empower children to take charge of their own health and well-being. Through initiatives like making soap, building handwashing stations, and growing nutritional gardens, students not only learn about nutrition but also develop practical skills that benefit their communities.

The results speak for themselves: after just one cycle of using the toolkit, significant improvements were observed in children's dietary habits and academic performance. The increase in consumption of fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and local herbs demonstrates the effectiveness of the programme in promoting healthier eating habits among students. Moreover, the reduction in the percentage of children who never played outdoor games or sports highlights the positive impact of the toolkit on physical activity levels.

Snapshot of the impact after one cycle of using the toolkit

From our midline studies

2500+ responses from school children across 148 schools

schoolchildren across India have shown the following impact in just 12 months of engaging with our programme:

14 % point decrease

in schoolchildren that are undernourished

32 % point increase

in schoolchildren who washed their hands with soap/sanitiser

14 % point increase

in schoolchildren who said that they could take charge of their nutrition

7.8 % point decrease

in children who never played outdoor games or sports

“ Our children talk about the toolkit games that they use in their school, about student ministers and taking responsibility for their class. Ever since the toolkit was introduced in their schools, children have grown more confident while communicating with people outside the family and readily participate in group activities. They are more self-assured and keen to take initiative. They also readily consume more fruits than before as they are more aware of the health benefits now. ”

- Women farmers like **Okita M.** from Kadwa, Amri Village in Banswara District

Overall, the Nourishing Schools Foundation's approach exemplifies the transformative potential of nutrition education in improving the health and well-being of children, thereby laying the foundation for a healthier future generation.



06.



Recommendations for Government Stakeholders

A parent Durga M. from the farming community in Rajasthan's Kadwa Amri Village had this to say about the important relation between nutrition and agriculture, "We find it important to make our farms an important source of nutrition for our families and therefore we grow varieties of vegetables and fruits alongside the rains. This has helped us provide nutritious and chemical-free foods to our families and to also the animals we rear. It has also introduced ecological diversity in our fields which in turn has improved soil health and yields."

The Government of India is proactively working to address the triple burden of malnutrition and has launched several initiatives and programmes in this regard

● **Eat Right India**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has undertaken a large-scale effort to transform the country's food system to ensure the availability of safe, healthy and wholesome food for all Indians through.

Eat Right India movement.

The initiative adopts a holistic and integrated approach to address the interconnected challenges of food safety, nutrition, and sustainability. By leveraging regulatory measures, capacity building efforts, collaborative partnerships, empowerment strategies, and collective action of all stakeholders - the government, food businesses, civil society organizations, experts and professionals, development agencies and citizens at large, the initiative aims to create a food environment that is beneficial for both people and the planet.

● **National Education Policy (2020)**

The Central Government has taken steps to address the knowledge gap regarding malnutrition and chronic hunger through curricular interventions, uniformly implemented across the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant milestone in 21st-century academia, prioritizing holistic development through nutrition and mental health.

In a further effort to promote nutrition among schoolchildren, the Government of India issued specific regulations in 2020 to prohibit the marketing or sale of unhealthy food items within school premises. Delivery of nutrition programmes is a multifaceted process that requires coordination and alignment across various stakeholders involved.

Some of the key elements for successful implementation of nutrition programmes are :

● **Policy Framework**

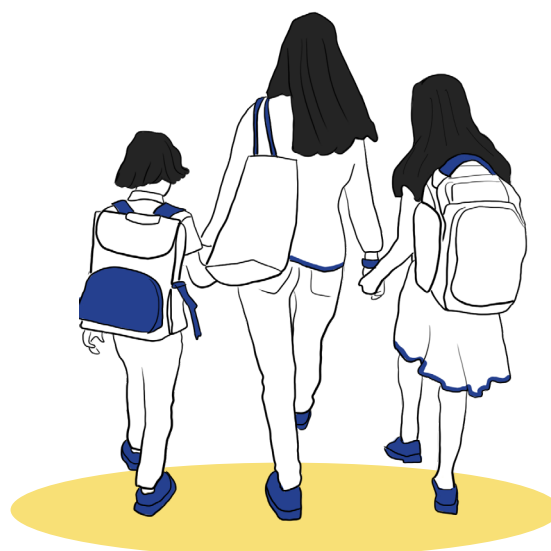
A strong policy framework is essential to provide direction and guidance for nutrition programmes. Policies should address issues such as food security, dietary guidelines, nutrition standards, and regulations to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.

● **Government Commitment**

Government commitment is critical for the successful implementation of nutrition programmes. This includes political will, leadership, and support at the highest levels of government, as well as the allocation of resources and prioritization of nutrition within broader health and development agendas.

● **Budget Allocation**

Adequate budget allocation is necessary to fund nutrition programmes effectively. Governments need to allocate sufficient financial resources to support programme implementation, including funding for infrastructure, human resources, supplies, and monitoring and evaluation activities.



07. Engaging Potential Donors



Nourishing Schools
Foundation started
With

14 schools in the

**Satara, Sangli and Pune
districts of Maharashtra**

and has scaled up to various states in India by collaborating with the respective state governments via non-financial partnerships. For example, we have collaborated in the past with the Government of Rajasthan wherein they helped us identify schools for rolling out the toolkit and also informed schools about the surveys and the toolkit rollout. Going forward, the Nourishing Schools Foundation is actively looking to scale-up by engaging with

potential donors, partner organizations, such as civil society organizations and education institutions, to implement the programme on a wider scale. Some elements of our scale-up strategy are:

● Partner-based expansion

Our strategy of working with organizations that are already present in our region of work, rather than setting up our own team and office in every region, has helped us scale to a large number of schools at a low cost and in a short amount of time. We leverage their existing networks and relationships with schools rather than creating our parallel structures. In this way, we integrate the Nourishing Schools programme into the work of local organizations. We also benefit from their years of experience in understanding the needs of their communities.

Local expertise and presence

We prefer to work with partners with a strong local presence and an in-depth understanding of the regional context, culture, and challenges. Local NGOs, community organizations, and educational institutions often have the necessary insights and networks.

Training teachers

We incorporated teacher training into our programme at the outset to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the programme. Currently, we are in talks with a state government to conduct teacher training programmes for the toolkit and rolling out the same.

Use of technology

We've invested in creating tools such as a custom-built Android survey app that can collect data using smartphones/tablets even without internet connectivity, as well as data dashboards to present results. We are now transitioning to using existing survey tools and data dashboard tools that can serve our needs more effectively. The marginal cost of collecting more data is, therefore, affordable. Due to the global pandemic, we also digitized several games from our toolkit, to reach out to school children even when schools were closed and to expand the toolkit's reach.

Government partnerships

As our programme has expanded to various states, we have leveraged government partnerships to either integrate our work into existing government programmes or to coordinate with the government to select the schools for rolling out our programme, wherever possible.

Nourishing Schools Foundation has been collaborating with donors for successful delivery and scale-up of nutrition programmes across schools. Delivery of holistic nutrition programmes such as our Nourishing Schools Foundation programme requires a comprehensive approach that addresses policy, government commitment, budget allocation, supply chains, service provider training, beneficiary engagement, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination among various stakeholders.



Key Insights from Speakers at the NSF Nutrition Conclave

“ There is an opportunity to conduct follow-up studies that track outcomes from early grades to later grades that can provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of such programmes on children's nutritional status. Collecting high-quality data, both quantitative and qualitative, is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of nutrition interventions. It is also important to acknowledge the challenges associated with data collection and address them to produce reliable results. Providing policymakers with robust data that meets global standards is essential for informed decision-making. Building an assessment component into nutrition interventions helps generate evidence-based insights that can guide policy formulation and programme improvement.”

- **Dr Jyoti Sharma**, Additional Professor,
Indian Institute of Public Health-Delhi

“ A key challenge that we face is that nutrition as a subject is found to be boring by the students. To address this, we feel that rather than presenting nutrition as a standalone subject, weaving it into subjects like science, math, history, geography and even literature can capture students' interest and make learning about food more enjoyable. Starting nutrition education at an early age is crucial. Teaching children about food selection, preparation, and cooking not only promotes healthy eating habits but also fosters a deeper appreciation for food and where it comes from. Encouraging parents to be involved in their children's nutrition education is essential. Providing tips for quick and nutritious meals, like one-pot meals supplemented with dairy and fruits/salads, can help busy parents prioritize healthy eating for their families. By integrating nutrition education across various subjects, students gain lifelong skills that extend beyond the classroom. Whether they're analyzing nutritional content in a science experiment or calculating serving sizes in math class, these skills will serve them well into adulthood.”

- **Ms. Sunetra Roday**, Independent Consultant -
Nutrition, Wellness and Food Safety; Author
and Academician

Conclusion



Nutrition is a fundamental aspect of human health that affects everyone, regardless of age, background, or circumstances. Despite its significance, many individuals do not have access to comprehensive nutrition education.



Nutrition education not only provides children with essential knowledge about healthy eating but also empowers them with valuable life skills. Learning how to prepare safe and nutritious meals equips children with practical skills that they can apply in their daily lives, fostering independence and self-sufficiency. Teaching children about healthy eating habits and nutrition from a young age is crucial. By instilling this knowledge early on, children can develop lifelong habits that promote health and prevent chronic diseases later in life.



Nutrition programmes such as the Nourishing Schools Programme that promote hands-on learning can effectively improve the nutritional status and health outcomes of populations, particularly vulnerable groups such as children. We have sufficient data to prove that by growing their own food, actively participating in cooking and food preparation activities, children develop a deeper appreciation for healthy foods and are more inclined to make healthier choices.



Comprehensive nutrition education that goes beyond just listing healthy foods is the need of the hour. By incorporating nutrition education into the school curriculum, we can teach children about the importance of balanced meals, portion sizes, reading food labels, nutritional information and providing a supportive environment to understand the long-term benefits of healthy dietary choices on overall health and well-being. A coordinated effort between governments, local NGOs, community organisations and educational institutions is essential to tackling the complex issue of malnutrition in India.

