

Daily Editorial Analysis 19 September 2025

September 19, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com

Equalising Primary Food Consumption in India

Context

- The publication of the **National Sample Survey's Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (2024)**, after more than a decade, has enabled new insights into poverty measurement in India.
- According to its report, Poverty and Equity Brief: INDIA (2025), extreme poverty — defined as living on less than \$2.15 a day, fell from **2 percent in 2011-12 to 2.3 percent in 2022-23**.
- Such a finding, if accurate, would represent a remarkable achievement, pointing to the near elimination of extreme poverty in the country.
- Yet, **alternative perspectives based on food consumption raise doubts** about whether these figures capture the full reality of deprivation.

Rethinking Poverty: The 'Thali' Approach

- Traditional poverty measurement in India has relied on a **calorie-based standard**, wherein income thresholds are tied to the cost of food providing a minimum calorific intake.
- **While this physiological approach has merit, it risks narrowing the concept of food security to energy alone**, excluding nourishment, dietary balance, and cultural satisfaction.
- An alternative method proposes the **thali meal**, comprising rice, dal, vegetables, roti, curd, and salad, as a holistic consumption unit.
- Balanced in nutrients, **the thali provides a more realistic benchmark for basic food adequacy** in South Asia.
- Applying this framework, **researchers estimated affordability based on household food expenditure** reported in the 2024 survey.
- With the cost of a home-cooked thali at ₹30 (as per CRISIL estimates), they found that **half of rural households and one-fifth of urban households could not afford two thalis per day**.
- Even when Public Distribution System (PDS) subsidies were factored in, the share of households unable to afford this minimal food standard remained significant: **40% in rural areas and 10% in urban areas**.
- This contrast highlights that food deprivation in India persists at levels far higher than those implied by the World Bank's poverty line.

The Public Distribution System: Successes and Limitations

- The PDS, central to India's food security strategy, plays a vital role in offsetting food deprivation.

- However, an analysis of subsidy distribution reveals **serious inefficiencies and inequities**. In rural India, subsidies are not strongly progressive: individuals in the **90th-95th income fractile receive almost as much subsidy as those in the bottom 5%**, despite their far higher purchasing power.
- Urban India shows a more progressive distribution, yet around **80% of urban households receive subsidised cereals**, including many who can already afford adequate consumption.
- Moreover, data show that **cereal consumption has plateaued across income groups**. Both the poorest and the richest consume roughly similar amounts of rice and wheat, suggesting that staple cereal demand has been met.
- This **indicates that further expansion of cereal distribution under the PDS**, such as the January 2024 policy extending free grain to 800 million people, may no longer reflect actual nutritional needs. Instead, it diverts public resources from other urgent areas.

Pulses as a Nutritional Priority

- Where significant disparities remain is in the consumption of **pulses**, a key source of protein in Indian diets.
- The poorest households consume only **half as much per capita as the richest**.
- Unlike cereals, **pulses are expensive and often unaffordable for low-income families**, despite their importance for balanced nutrition.
- **Expanding the PDS to cover pulses would address this gap directly**, promoting not only food sufficiency but also nutritional equity.
- A restructuring of the PDS is therefore warranted.
- By **trimming excessive cereal entitlements** for households already consuming adequate amounts and redirecting resources to supply pulses, the government could achieve two goals simultaneously: reduce fiscal and logistical burdens while raising the nutritional intake of the poorest.
- **Such a policy would also bring the food consumption** of the most deprived closer to that of the richest, a globally significant equalisation.

Policy Implications

- The juxtaposition of World Bank poverty statistics with thali-based measures of food affordability underlines a crucial truth: **income-based poverty lines may obscure deeper forms of deprivation**.
- While extreme poverty may be diminishing, widespread **food insecurity and nutritional deprivation remain pressing challenges**.
- The PDS, though **effective in equalising cereal consumption, is no longer sufficient** in its current form.
- **A restructured PDS, leaner in cereals but expanded in pulses — could be transformative**.
- It would target subsidies toward those most in need, reduce wasteful expenditures, and promote dietary balance.
- Importantly, such reforms would align poverty alleviation not merely with survival, but with **dignity, nutrition, and human well-being**.

Conclusion

- The **debate on India's poverty must move beyond aggregate income thresholds** and embrace multidimensional indicators like the thali.
- **Only then can policy fully address the realities of deprivation** and chart a path toward equitable, sustainable food security for all.

Equalising Primary Food Consumption in India FAQs

Q1. What did the World Bank's 2025 report reveal about poverty in India?

Ans. The World Bank reported that extreme poverty in India declined from 16.2% in 2011-12 to 2.3% in 2022-23.

Q2. Why is the thali meal considered a better metric for measuring food adequacy?

Ans. The thali meal reflects not just calorie intake but also nourishment and dietary balance, making it a more realistic measure of food sufficiency.

Q3. What did the thali-based analysis reveal about food deprivation in rural areas?

Ans. It showed that about 50% of rural households could not afford two thalis a day, even before accounting for PDS subsidies.

Q4. Why is the current PDS subsidy system seen as inefficient?

Ans. It provides cereals to many households that can already afford enough food, spreading resources thin and failing to target the poorest effectively.

Q5. How could restructuring the PDS improve nutritional equity?

Ans. By reducing excessive cereal subsidies and expanding support for pulses, the PDS could raise the nutritional intake of the poorest households.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India Needs More Focus to Reach SDG 3, A Crucial Goal

Context:

- In June 2025, India achieved its best-ever position in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index, ranking 99 out of 167 countries, up from 109 in 2024.
- The improvement reflects steady progress since 2021, particularly in expanding access to basic services and infrastructure.
- However, the SDG Report highlighted persistent challenges in health and nutrition, where progress has been uneven, especially across rural and tribal communities.
- This article highlights India's progress and challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) — health and well-being — emphasising gaps in maternal mortality, child survival, life expectancy, healthcare access, and the urgent need for systemic reforms and health education.

India's Struggles with SDG 3: Health and Well-Being

- India's progress on **SDG 3**, which aims to ensure **healthy lives and well-being for all by 2030**, remains off-track despite some gains.
- The **Maternal Mortality Ratio** is 97 deaths per 100,000 live births, above the target of 70.
- The **under-five mortality rate** is 32 per 1,000 live births, compared to the target of 25.
- **Life expectancy** stands at 70 years, below the target of 73.63.
- **Out-of-pocket health expenditure** is 13% of household consumption, nearly double the goal of 7.83%.
- **Immunisation coverage**, though strong at 93.23%, still falls short of the universal 100% target.

Reasons Behind the Slow Progress

- Key barriers include inadequate access to quality healthcare due to weak infrastructure and economic constraints.
- Non-economic factors such as poor nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, and lifestyle choices further worsen outcomes.
- Cultural practices, stigma around health issues, and low awareness often prevent communities from using available services.

Steps Required to Accelerate Progress on SDG Goal 3

- Accelerating progress requires a three-pronged strategy:
 - **Universal Health Insurance** to reduce financial burdens and improve equitable access, as shown by global experiences.
 - **Robust Primary Health Centres** with better coordination across primary, secondary, and tertiary care to detect diseases early and lower costs.
 - The **World Health Statistics 2022** by WHO emphasises that robust primary healthcare systems enable early disease detection, lower hospitalisation costs, and deliver better long-term health outcomes.
 - **Leveraging Digital Health Tools** like telemedicine and integrated records to bridge rural access gaps. Global evidence, including from The Lancet Digital Health Commission, highlights how digital innovations improve maternal care and vaccination coverage — lessons India can adapt.

Health Education in Schools: A Key to Prevention

- Prevention is more cost-effective than treatment, and school-level health education is vital for shaping lifelong habits.
- Teaching children about nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, reproductive health, road safety, and mental health can improve behaviours early, with long-term benefits.
- Educated girls, as future mothers, can better advocate for family health, helping reduce maternal mortality, under-five deaths, and road accidents, while improving life expectancy and immunisation.
- Global examples strengthen this case: Finland's 1970s reforms reduced cardiovascular diseases, while Japan's compulsory health education improved hygiene and longevity.
- A structured, **progressive curriculum in India could deliver similar transformative outcomes.**

Need for Collective Action to Achieve SDG Goals

- Closing India's SDG gap requires joint efforts from policymakers, parents, and citizens.
- Policymakers must embed health education in school curricula, expand universal health coverage, and strengthen primary healthcare.
- Parents should ensure schools cover physical, mental, and social health, and push for reforms if needed.
- While India's improved SDG ranking is encouraging, only 17% of global targets are on track for 2030.
- Educating youth in healthy behaviour, backed by robust healthcare systems, can lay the foundation for sustainable progress.
- Looking beyond 2030, embedding health education is key to realising the vision of a healthier, stronger *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

India Needs More Focus to Reach SDG 3, A Crucial Goal FAQs

Q1. What rank did India secure in the 2025 SDG Index, and how does it compare to 2024?

Ans. India ranked 99 out of 167 nations in 2025, improving from 109 in 2024, showing steady progress in expanding access to basic services.

Q2. Why is India's progress on SDG 3 considered off-track despite improvements?

Ans. Despite gains, India lags in maternal and child mortality, life expectancy, healthcare costs, and immunisation, all of which remain short of 2030 targets.

Q3. What key barriers are slowing India's achievement of SDG 3 targets?

Ans. Poor healthcare infrastructure, economic constraints, malnutrition, sanitation gaps, lifestyle issues, cultural practices, stigma, and limited awareness hinder effective health outcomes and service utilisation.

Q4. What three strategies are recommended to accelerate India's progress on SDG 3?

Ans. Expanding universal health insurance, strengthening primary healthcare centres, and leveraging digital health tools like telemedicine and integrated records to bridge rural gaps and cut costs.

Q5. How can school-level health education contribute to achieving SDG 3?

Ans. Teaching children about nutrition, hygiene, reproductive health, and mental well-being builds lifelong habits, reducing mortality, improving life expectancy, and ensuring long-term public health gains.

Source: **TH**

Technology as the Grammar of Governance

Context:

- Over the past two decades, **technology** has emerged as the **biggest equalizer** in India's governance.
- From Gujarat experiments to **nationwide digital public infrastructure**, India has mainstreamed **technology as a tool for antyodaya**—reaching the last person in the queue.

Gujarat - The Laboratory of Innovation:

- **Rural electrification - Jyotigram Scheme (2003):**

- **Feeder separation technology** ensured 24×7 power to rural households and industries.
- Reduced groundwater depletion (through scheduled farm electricity), promoted women's education, and revived rural industries resulted in the **reduction of rural-urban migration**.
- Investment of ₹1,115 crore recovered in just 2.5 years.

- **Installing solar panels on the Narmada canal (2012):**

- Generated 16 million units annually, powered 16,000 homes.
- Reduced water evaporation, showcasing a **dual-benefit approach**.
- The global adoption by the **USA and Spain** adds credibility to the innovation's effectiveness.

- **Governance technology:**

- **e-Dhara**: Digitized land records.
- **SWAGAT**: Direct CM-citizen video interactions.
- **Online tenders**: Reduced corruption.
- These initiatives **reduced corruption**, improved the **ease of accessing government service**, restoring the **trust** of people in governance.

National Canvas - From Gujarat to Delhi:

- **India Stack and JAM Trinity:**

- **Jan Dhan Accounts**: It brought over 53 crore people into the banking system, bringing the hitherto financially excluded into the formal economy for the first time.
- **Aadhaar**:
 - It gave the citizens a **digital identity with 142 crore registrations** done so far, making government services more accessible.
 - **For example**, Aadhaar-based e-KYC is reduced to just Rs 5 per authentication.
- **Mobile (UPI)**: Over 55 crore users have transacted since its launch. For example, over 20 billion transactions worth Rs 24.85 lakh crore took place in August 2025 alone.
- **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)**: It has eliminated middlemen and reduced leakages, resulting in **savings of over Rs 4.3 lakh crore so far**. This has been diverted to building more schools, hospitals, and infrastructure projects.

- **PRAGATI platform:**

- Monthly PM-led project monitoring through video conferences.
- Ensured **real-time accountability** in governance.

Technology in Key Sectors:

- **Agriculture and healthcare:**

- **AI apps for farmers**, real-time weather and soil data.
- **PM-KISAN**: The scheme delivers direct income support to 11 crore farmers digitally.
- **DigiLocker**: It now has over 57 crore users, with 967 crore documents stored digitally.

- **Space achievements:**

- **Mars Orbiter Mission**: It reached Mars on the first attempt and that too with a budget (₹450 crore) smaller than a Hollywood movie.
- **Chandrayaan-3**: It made India the fourth country to achieve a soft lunar landing and the first to land on the Moon's South Pole.
- **Other achievements**:
 - ISRO launched **104 satellites** in a single mission, setting a world record.
 - The **Gaganyaan** mission will make India the fourth nation to send humans to space using indigenous technology.
- **COVID-19 response**: Built in record time, it is a comprehensive digital solution for the world's largest vaccination drive. The platform managed **200 crore vaccine doses** with digital precision (preventing black-marketing and wastage).

Manufacturing and Infrastructure:

- **Electronics and semiconductors:**

- **Building capabilities** step-by-step across value chains.
- India contributes **20%** of global chip design talent.
- Focus on 2nm, 3nm and 7nm chip design, fabs, and ecosystem development.

- **PM Gati Shakti Portal:**

- GIS-based infrastructure planning integrating roads, rail, ports, airports, eliminating silos and reducing delays.

- **AI and data:**

- **IndiaAI Mission**: Over 38,000 GPUs available at one-third of global cost. This has given startups, researchers, and students Silicon Valley-level computing at an average rate of Rs 67 per hour.
- **AIKosh**: The platform hosts 2,000-plus datasets, ranging from weather to soil health. These can **power indigenous LLMs** developed for India's languages, laws, health systems, and finance.
- India's techno-legal framework **balances** innovation and safeguards (deepfakes, privacy, cybersecurity).

Engineering Marvels:

- **Statue of Unity (Kevadia, Gujarat):** World's tallest statue (182 meters), attracts 58 lakh annual visitors, creating jobs and making Kevadia a tourism hub.
- **Chenab Bridge:** World's highest railway bridge (359 meters high), connects Kashmir to the rest of India.
- **Aizawl Rail Line:** It uses the innovative Himalayan Tunnelling Method, passing through tunnels and bridges in very tough terrain.
- **The new Pamban Bridge:** It replaces a century-old structure with modern engineering (first vertical lift sea bridge in India).

Global Leadership:

- Countries like **Singapore, France** are integrated with UPI.
- **The G20** endorsed Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as essential for inclusive growth. Japan has granted a patent for this.
- What started as India's solution became the **world's template for digital democracy**.

Human-Centric Vision:

- **The vision of antyodaya** drives every digital initiative. **For example**, UPI works in multiple languages.
- **Digital identity** and access to services **democratized** across classes. **For example**,
 - The poorest farmer has the same digital identity as the richest industrialist.
 - Street vendors and corporate executives use the same UPI platform.

Conclusion:

- **Technology** as the **grammar of governance** is India's defining **21st-century shift**.
- From financial inclusion to global space leadership, India's model **integrates scale, speed, and sustainability**.
- The challenge ahead lies in –
 - Bridging the **digital divide** across regions and social groups.
 - Ensuring **cybersecurity** and data privacy.
 - Building resilient semiconductor and AI ecosystems.
- The current government's vision demonstrates that when **technology meets humanity**, nations can leapfrog development stages and provide inclusive, transparent, and efficient governance.

Technology as the Grammar of Governance FAQs

Q1. How did the Jyotigram Scheme in Gujarat reflect the principle of 'antyodaya' in governance?

Ans. By providing 24×7 electricity through feeder separation, it revived rural industries, empowered women, and reduced migration.

Q2. What is the significance of the JAM Trinity in India's digital transformation?

Ans. The JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile) enabled financial inclusion through direct benefit transfers, and UPI payments.

Q3. In what ways has technology improved governance accountability in India?

Ans. Platforms like PRAGATI enabled real-time monitoring of projects by the Prime Minister.

Q4. What is the role of India's DPI in strengthening global leadership?

Ans. India's DPI model, including UPI and CoWIN, showcased scale, speed, and inclusivity.

Q5. How does India's approach to AI regulation differ from global models?

Ans. Unlike market-driven or state-controlled approaches, India follows **a techno-legal model investing in safeguards** (deepfake detection, privacy tools) while fostering innovation.

Source: IE

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/daily-editorial-analysis-19-september-2025/>

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