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Featured Article by Guest Contributor

Nutritional Equity: Supporting Proximate Leaders and Innovations

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As the world's largest democracy, India with its soon-to-be 1bn-strong electorate, will go into another national election next year. Going by our track record, over 75% people will be provided with an opportunity to cast their vote, no matter where they live. By the end of that exercise, we would have conducted yet another largest ever political election anywhere in the world.

This is not a one-off feat for our country. There are a few other examples.

Aadhar was one of the most complex unique identity projects, not only for India but the world. When we embarked on this as a country, we had more instances of failures of unique ID projects than successes, across the world. Today 95% of our population have Aadhar registrations, which includes a biometric identity for every individual citizen!

More recently, we took just 24 months, from developing a brand-new COVID19 vaccine to administering it to over a billion, with every individual's data on one portal! One of our four mobile-service providers in the country has over 1.2bn individual paid subscriptions, covering the length and breadth of our country. We have mobile towers and have sold connections in most inconceivable locations of India.

All these above instances show our irrefutable ability to develop solutions at scale, change human-behaviour, govern effectively, create markets and tackle larger-than life challenges within our lifetimes. Perhaps in the last decade alone. Why is it then that after 76 years of freedom, India still finds itself enslaved to the problem of undernutrition for women and children?

We seem to have good knowledge of 'what needs to happen' to improve nutrition status. We know the evidence-based interventions that exist. The action that needs to be taken is crystal clear. It is the actors who fail to act because of several complex reasons.



Who are these actors?

First and foremost, it is the individual household that faces undernutrition. No matter what is available or provided, the decision to use or consume is theirs. That decision is often a function of their education, knowledge, or interest in nutrition as a fundamental need to become physically, emotionally, and cognitively strong. The other set of actors comprises those who have a mandate or intention to provide essential nutrition to the vulnerable communities. This includes governments, civil society organizations, and businesses who may want to serve low-income segments (limiting the definition of nutritionally vulnerable to low-income for this article, while we know undernutrition is not limited to low-income populations alone).

Why do these actors fail to act?

Unfortunately, the need of healthy nutrition (as against hunger) or wellness is hidden. It is real, but not visible like in other cases. For example, no one had to make a case for mobile phones, or sell the 'idea' of communication to people. Its personal and economic value was always apparent.

However, on the other hand, I am not sure if most vulnerable people easily associate a child's stunted development with the odds of a family's economic future or correlate severe malnutrition with increasing health risks, medical treatment, and possible trauma a few years down. So, it becomes an unreal expectation from the people with young children at home to choose to grow vegetables for themselves in their family. It is unnatural for rural, under-educated families to spend their limited money on 'nutritious' food, as against crisps or fries. While these might seem overly simple examples, it is important to recognize that the first actor in the mission of nutrition is people in the household, who make decisions, unaware if it is in favour of or against the family's nutrition.

This is layered with the perils of stark poverty and ultra-poor families, who barely eat once a day, or just consume rice and salt. This is further exacerbated by deeply gendered roles, with men tending to be more mobile and hence buying and consuming more than pregnant women or adolescent growing children at home. Lastly, there are cultural, familial, and religious biases which influence the choice of consumption at critical stages for both children and women.

Let us talk about the other actors. Health workers serving some of the most remote villages in India lead an unenviable life, having to travel long distances and long hours and living amidst pressure to deal with low resources and high demands on the healthcare system. Young doctors and health workers in the private hospitals choose to work in towns if not large cities, to have better living standards. This makes the rural poor intergenerationally deprived of good, modern, and talented human resources. Digital innovators tend to serve locations that have connectivity – and often skip the hard-to-reach communities. Entrepreneurs tend to choose easier markets with predictable returns and ‘formal’ sector (for e.g., bankable populations). Civil society is hugely dependent on the availability of donations, which come with limitation of certain geographies, not always serving the most vulnerable.



Proximate leaders and innovations

India has been a breeding ground for innovations – from most frugal to the most sophisticated, from localised to large-scale. However, often solutions created by people with little or no lived experience of the problem, fail to serve those who are most affected by it.

Promising rural innovations that show potential often stumble when it comes to scaling up. Limited funding, inadequate support systems and an absence of tailored strategies for rural contexts hinder the expansion of successful local initiatives. For instance, a small-scale community farming project that aimed to improve dietary diversity by promoting the cultivation of nutrient-rich crops might find it challenging to secure the resources needed to expand its impact across multiple villages.

In my experience it is only leaders who are proximate to the need or a problem who create solutions that stick and scale. These leaders innovate where it is needed, with a hand on the pulse of human and societal behaviour, deep understanding of systemic patterns, and skill to integrate with markets and governments. These are the leaders and innovators who need to be supported.

Poshan Innovation Platform

The current Poshan Abhiyan announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Mission Poshan 2.0 architecture by Government of India creates a fertile ground for action. The Anaemia Mukt Bharat mission indicates an audacious and much-needed goal. The time is right for rural and urban talent in India to explore game-changing ways to develop nutritional status of infants, young children, and pregnant women in India.

This necessitates the establishment of a comprehensive platform dedicated to searching, selecting, supporting, and scaling ideas and innovations. The Poshan Innovation Platform will be India's first ever repository of innovative projects that have demonstrated their effectiveness in improving nutrition literacy, dietary diversity, and health-seeking behaviour among vulnerable communities. This is an opportunity for anyone with sincere interest in nutrition to come, join hands to set up and run this platform – a special place to gather and share good ideas.

The platform will allow:

- **Professional Framework:** The Poshan Innovation Platform will be the first ever professionally run platform with implementation-science framework, which will allow innovations the due scientific evidence and credibility they need to scale.
- **Discovery and Knowledge Sharing:** A centralized platform would enable innovators, researchers, and NGOs to share their insights and experiences. This would facilitate the replication of successful strategies and the adaptation of projects to suit different local conditions.
- **Community Engagement:** The platform could act as a hub for communities to access relevant information in local languages, ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and accessible.
- **Funding and Support:** Such a platform could attract funding and support from governmental and non-governmental organizations, allowing promising innovations to scale up and have a more significant impact.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The platform could incorporate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating ongoing projects, ensuring that they remain effective and responsive to evolving community needs.

It's time to make sure that everyone gets a chance to eat better and be healthier. Everyone to access markets they deserve. And most importantly, everyone to have an opportunity to live a fuller life.

IMPAct4Nutrition ENGAGEMENTS

Workshop on “Workplace Nutrition” with members of the Manesar Industries Welfare Association (MIWA)

IMPAct4Nutrition (I4N) in association with Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and MIWA organized a workshop for regional business owners on - "Creating a Better Workplace, One Bite at a Time," on August 12th, 2023. The workshop was hosted at Epicurean Hospitality Services Pvt Limited, one of the pledged partners of I4N, and was attended by over 40 participants.

Shubhrajyoti Bhowmik, Puneet Mital, Abhishek Kishore, Jyoti Jyotsana, and Snehal Kochar from the I4N secretariat, Biju Mushahary & Aishwarya from GAIN were present during the workshop.

The workshop emphasized the importance of workforce nutrition and its direct benefits to the employers and the employee workforce on health and well-being. Several examples of contribution from the private sector on nutrition through Assets, CSR, or Employee Volunteering were given by the team, highlighting the fact that better nutrition at the workplace directly impacts employee productivity, better employee retention, and the overall bottom line of the business. An emphasis was also placed on using and consuming fortified foods to meet daily nutritional demands and requirements.

Mr. Rajat Dogra, Managing Director at Epicurean Hospitality, and Mrs. Shalu Dogra emphasized the importance of nutrition in a subsidized meal provided at the workplace and how it can be beneficial for the overall productivity of the employees, and the overall bottom line for the businesses.

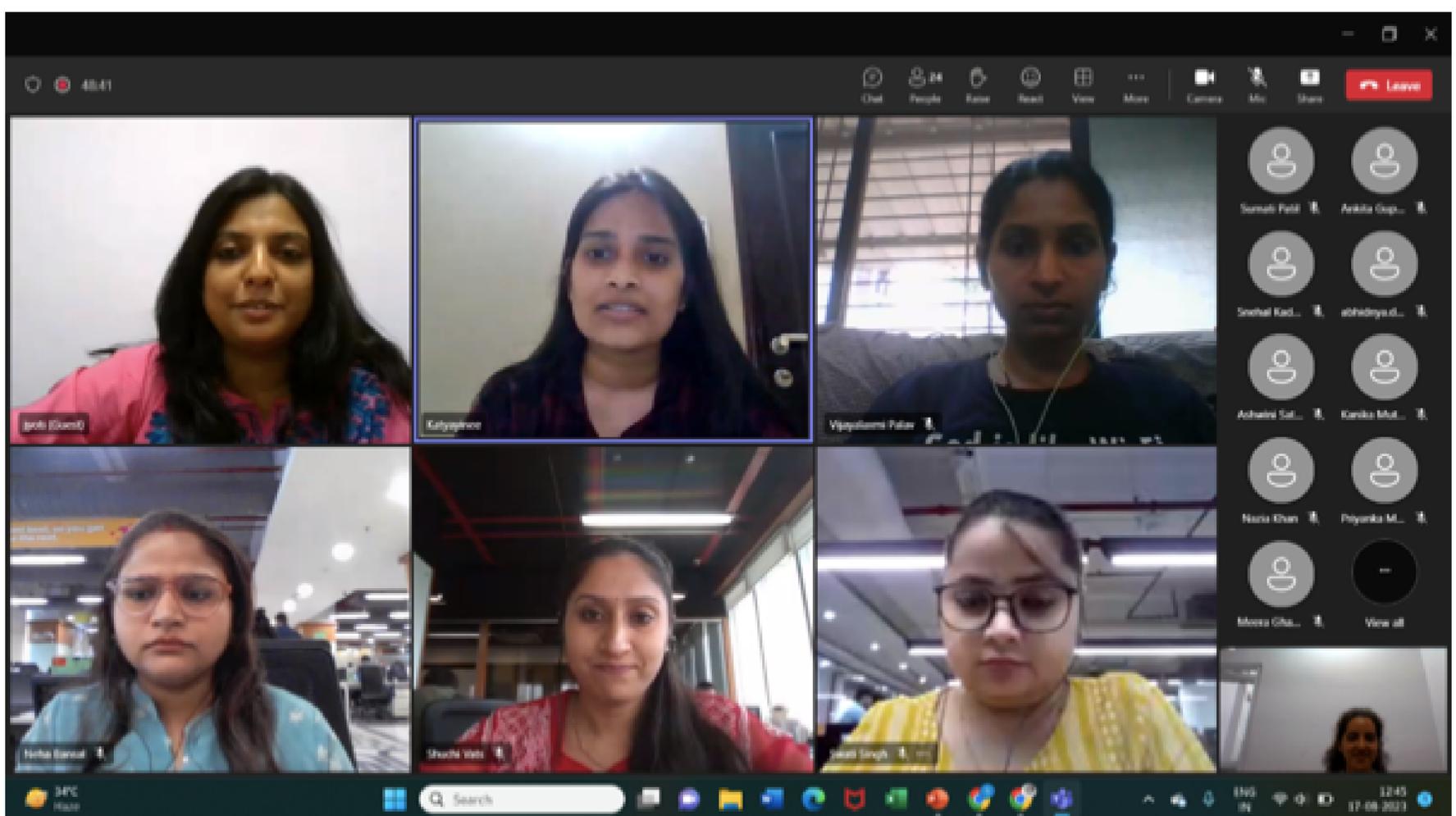
Mr. Vikash Gupta, Secretary MIWA and Managing Director, Ranvik Exports said that they are delighted to be a part of this noble initiative and would take every possible step to help the program achieve attainable heights and its realistic goals for the betterment of workforce nutrition.

It was an interactive workshop, where participants also shared challenges that they encountered while promoting healthy eating habits among their workers. Inadequate awareness of nutrition, budget constraints, and resistance to change from employees were amongst the top challenges that were highlighted.



I4N conducted a session with Business Next

A webinar was taken with Business Next on 17.8.23 under their Wellness Next program vertical and the theme was Reproductive health and its importance in women. The female employees were educated on the dietary strategies, the leading causes behind the inflammation, the precipitating factors behind the symptoms, etc. Apart from this, the dietary regimen along with the remedies, and emphasis on a healthy lifestyle was also discussed for better propagation. The audience was very interactive.



Knowledge sharing session with TATA Power- DDL, ABHA workers, celebrating “World Breastfeeding Week”

In lieu of International World Breastfeeding Week, which is observed from 1st to 7th August 2023 worldwide, I4N secretariat conducted a workshop with the 150+ ABHA workers, at TATA Power-DDL at Delhi.

The session covered information on few important elements of growth of the infant such as appropriate time for breastfeeding, symptoms of inadequate nutrition, what foods to avoid during the lactation stage, etc. Apart from this, topics related to adequate time for the introduction of complementary feeds, sample foods and gauging the needs of the child was also discussed (in general). Knowledge was also imparted related to the milestones which determine the growth and development of the child.

The focus of the session was to educate women on the critical needs of taking care of the child as well as for the lactating mother.

A video clip released by the National Nutrition Mission was displayed for a better understanding of the theme.

The participating women found the session very engaging which demystified several of their myths. The session commenced with remarks from Mrs. Tripathi, Asst. GM, TATA – DDL stressing on the inexplicable role of women being the epicenter of each family, universally.



World Breastfeeding Week celebrated with Ranvik Exports, Manesar

To spread awareness during World's Breast feeding week, a session was conducted with the women workforce at Ranvik Exports, 360 (one of the pledged partner of I4N) by the I4N secretariat.

Women employees were trained on the importance of breastmilk, which is crucial for the growth of child. The benefits of breastmilk along with its nutritional factors were discussed amongst the women. The importance of colostrum, why breastmilk should be given, its beneficial effects on the child, and important pointers like initiation within an hour of delivery were also explained.



PLEDGE UPDATE



IMPAct4Nutrition is happy to expand its reach in Southern Region by onboarding the above Pledged Partners.



IMPAct4Nutrition is happy to expand its reach in Northern Region by onboarding the above Pledged Partners.

POSHAN MAAH 2023

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is celebrating the 6th Rashtriya Poshan Maah throughout September 2023. This year, the objective is to comprehensively tackle malnutrition through a life-cycle approach. The focal point of Poshan Maah 2023 is to cultivate widespread awareness concerning critical human life stages: pregnancy, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. The aim is to foster nutritional understanding across India through a theme centered on “Suposhit Bharat, Sakshar Bharat, Sashakt Bharat” (Nutrition-rich India, Educated India, Empowered India).



PROPOSED TOPIC POSHAN MAAH 2023

- Recipe Competition
 - Employee Engagement workshop on Anemia
 - Awareness session on Healthy dietary practices
 - Demonstration session on cooking nutritious complementary food recipes
 - Connecting Millets with Health Employee Engagement
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Employee Wellbeing Initiative: Test-Treat-Talk Anaemia

IMPAct4Nutrition, in collaboration with the CSRBOX and IndiGive Foundation kickstarted the celebration of September as a Nutrition Month. With the Employee Well-being Initiative under Test-Treat-Talk Anaemia guidelines by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. IMPAct4Nutrition initiated a wellness workshop and anaemia screening with a fun discussion of the ideal eating habits for the day and an awareness workshop on anaemia. This led to the haemoglobin test to detect anaemia. Towards the end, CSRBOX employees pledged to look after their nutritional well-being with healthy recipes and snacking habits to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH



Peda Recipe

An easy sweet and savoury snack

Ingredients:

Mushroom Powder - 250gm

Milk - 1000ml

Sugar - 100gm

Method:

Boil milk on medium flame till it thickens.

When milk thickens, add mushroom powder & keep stirring.

After mushroom gets cooked, add sugar.

Keep stirring till it thickens.

Cool it. Make a ball and serve.

Recipe courtesy: Krishi Vigyan Kendra Harnaut (Nalanda) from the book 'Food and Related Products, Compilation of Recipes across India States'

NUTRITION TIP OF THE MONTH

Instead of depriving yourself of favorite foods, moderation while eating can help in reducing craving and binge eating related to particular foods

Source: NIN

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