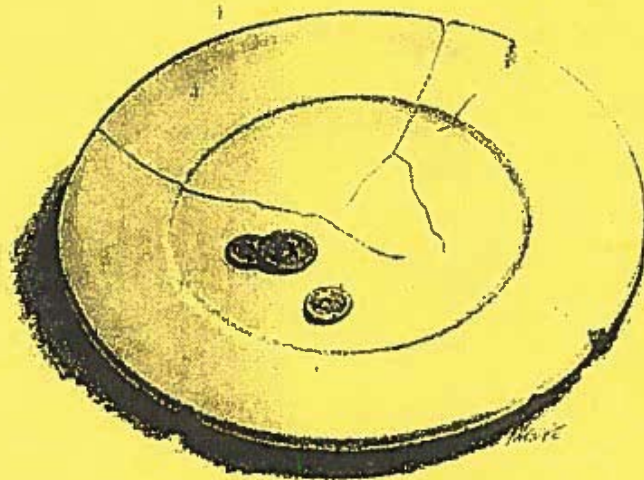


# PROJECT SYNDICATE

A WORLD OF IDEAS

## INDIA'S NEEDLESS HUNGER



PROJECT SYNTHICATE

WORK IS BEING DONE



## PROJECT SYNDICATE

Asit K. Biswas

, Rajiv Gupta

# India's Needless Hunger

16 October 2012

SINGAPORE – India is expected to overtake China as the world's most populous country by 2030, reaching 1.7 billion people by 2050. On World Food Day, India's leaders must consider whether they can feed the country's booming population.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, one in seven people worldwide – 925 million people in total – goes to bed hungry each night. Roughly one-quarter of these people – 230 million – are Indian. In other words, nearly one in five Indians suffers from chronic hunger.

The Global Hunger Index, published by the International Food Policy Research Institute, ranks India 65th among 88 vulnerable countries, below both Pakistan and Nepal. Indeed, 21% of India's population is undernourished, and more than half of all pregnant women are anemic. Nearly 44% of children under the age of five are malnourished – 7% of whom die each year. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called this “a national shame.”

Given India's impressive economic performance and rapidly growing *per capita* GNP, this failure is unjustifiable. In fact, India – the world's largest producer of milk and edible oils, and the second-largest producer of wheat, fruits, vegetables, and sugar – produces enough food to combat hunger. But poverty, creaking supply chains, rampant food waste, and badly formulated, poorly executed policies, such as rigid subsidies for grain farmers, prevent millions from receiving their share.

While there is enough food overall, surplus food from some areas does not reach the hunger belt (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh). Given India's massive projected population growth, its leaders must increase agricultural productivity and improve supply management.

Rice yields in India increased from 1.52 tons per hectare in 1961 to 3.37 tons/ha in 2008 – a total increase of 122%. But China's 2008 rice yield was 6.61 tons/ha, Turkey's was seven tons/ha, and Indonesia and Vietnam yielded 4.88 tons/ha each (96%, 105%, and 45% better than India's yield, respectively).

# RESEARCH REPORT

Author: [Name]  
Date: [Date]  
Title: [Title]

Abstract: [Abstract text]

Introduction: [Introduction text]

Methodology: [Methodology text]

Results: [Results text]

Conclusion: [Conclusion text]

References: [References text]

Given India's thousands of years of experience cultivating rice, this disparity is inexcusable. If the country's leaders implement realistic policies aimed at overcoming current constraints, Indian rice yields could reach double their 2008 levels by 2020.

Furthermore, policymakers at the national and state levels must address India's massive food waste – an issue that they have largely ignored. The Third World Center for Water Management estimates that nearly 40% of food produced annually in India is lost, mainly during harvesting and distribution.

More than 40% of the fruits and vegetables that India produces rot, owing to mismanagement and corruption, inadequate infrastructure, lack of refrigerated storage, shoddy logistics, and underdeveloped marketing channels. Similarly, more than one-third of the cereal produced is wasted. As a result, farmers' incomes suffer while food prices soar.

Currently, Malaysia processes 80% of its perishable products, while Thailand processes 30%. India, by contrast, processes roughly 2%. In order to help Indians to process the food that they produce before it perishes, the food supply chain must be modernized.

Moreover, as rapid economic growth fuels a surge in the ranks of India's upper and middle classes, many families are displaying their newly acquired affluence with lavish feasts at their children's weddings. An estimated 10 million weddings occur in India annually. Assuming that the average wedding costs roughly 300,000 rupees (\$5,700), Indians spend about Rs3 trillion on weddings each year – roughly one-third of which is allotted to the meal. According to India's food minister, K.V. Thomas, one-fifth of the food is ultimately discarded, resulting in a huge annual loss just during weddings.

The continued prevalence of hunger in India, does not reflect insurmountable obstacles. In fact, given today's knowledge, technology, and available investment funds, hunger and malnutrition in the country could be tackled effectively. To paraphrase Shakespeare, the fault lies in the fact that those who need help are regarded as inferior, and lack the power to initiate change. If India's leaders do not speak for them, hunger will remain the country's shame.

This article is available online at:

<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/feeding-india-s-hungry-by-asit-k--biswas-and-rajiv-gupta>

Copyright Project Syndicate - [www.project-syndicate.org](http://www.project-syndicate.org)