

1. Critically examine the implications of providing energy-dense, factory-made nutrient packets as take-home ration under Anganwadi Services Scheme. (250 words)

Answer:

Background:-

- National Family Health Survey-4 shows a drop in underweight and stunted children under five years of age compared to the previous survey. An estimated 35.7% children are underweight and 38.4% are stunted in that age group.
- These figures cause alarm that even after a long period of robust economic growth, India has not achieved a transformation.
- The National Food Security Act, 2013, Schedule II and the Supplementary Nutrition (Integrated Child Development Services Scheme) Rules, 2017 aim to raise nutritional standards of the food provided.

Proposal :-

- There was a proposal that energy-dense, factory-made nutrient packets will be take-home ration for pregnant women and lactating mothers as well as children between the age of six months and three years
- **Ready to use therapeutic foods**
 - RUTF, also referred to as energy dense nutritious food (EDNF), consists of a paste of peanuts, oil, sugar, vitamins, milk powder and mineral supplements.

Positives:-

- Each state can make its own mash with local ingredients. These can be in powdered form and mixed with regular meals. This will be a good initiative
- The take-home ration given today is mostly a non-nutritious mix which can be rectified by the energy dense foods.
- Energy dense foods are already commonly used in Africa where the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supports community-based provision of RUTF.
 - A small scale study in Mumbai put RUTF's efficacy at 65-70 per cent.
 - In 2013, a UNICEF report observed that if properly used, RUTF is safe, cost-effective, and has saved hundreds of thousands of children's lives.
- Packed Food is flexible in Nature as it can be changed according to the needs of the society.
- As post office is supposedly to be involved in delivery monitoring and inspection can be easier.

Negatives :-

• **Commercialisation:-**

- Attempts to substitute meals or rations with factory-made nutrients will inject commercialisation into a key mission, and upset the nutritional basis of the scheme.
- It is a move towards centralisation and corporatisation of anganwadi food.
- Packaged food would also mark a shift to centralised control by private contractors, which has been banned by the Supreme Court
- **NFSA act, 2013:-**
 - There is a need for continuance of the existing practice of hot cooked meals for children (3-6 years) age group and take-home ration (THR) for children (6 months-3 years) and pregnant women and lactating mothers as decided by the State governments in conformity with the National Foods Security Act, 2013,

and the Supplementary Nutrition Rules, 2017. The view was endorsed unanimously by the national nutrition Council.

- It does not emphasise the importance of empowering anganwadi workers to ensure proper delivery of services as well as engaging local self-help groups to ensure region-location based recipe and dietary diversification.
- National nutrition council:-
 - The decision of the council emphasised the need to ensure that children and women get nutritious food through ICDS and warned against the move to go for processed foods, which have been linked to rise in non-communicable diseases
- **Problems with energy dense foods:-**
 - Use of RUTF may replace family foods that children should normally be eating.
 - Enough evidence is not available for the use of RUTF vis-à-vis other interventions for the management of Severe acute malnutrition
 - Caretakers thought that their job was done by giving children RUTF, and hence children were not cared for properly.
 - RUTF may not benefit the common household in developing appropriate food habits for children as against home augmented food.
 - Cost is a major concern.
 - Given that well over a third of all children aged under five years are stunted or underweight, the implementation of an RUTF regime will impose a massive financial burden on the government.
 - A small study showed that children who were given RUTF found it too heavy to eat anything else afterward. Also, once RUTF was stopped, children often slipped back into malnutrition.
- **Corruption:-**
 - Such centralised commercial production and distribution is prone to corruption and poor quality.
 - Unholy nexus between the contractors and politicians/bureaucrats might result in central contracts worth hundreds of crores for supply of food to ICDS.
 - The quality of food supplied to the centres is compromised while companies make profits from the meagre allocation on supplementary nutrition .This will only be complicated if the proposal is accepted.
- **Dietary diversity:-**
 - Introduction of nutrient packets will be against the objective of moving towards dietary diversity.
- **Local awareness :-**
 - The provision of nutritious, cooked meals at the Anganwadi is a form of nutrition education as it helps to convey what a nutritious meal looks like, and to spread the notion that children require a regular and balanced intake of various nutrients.
 - It provides the opportunity to create employment for local women as well as demand for local product such as vegetables, eggs, etc. All of this is possible only when the food is produced and distributed in a decentralised manner which is not possible in this scenario
- Intervention to replace locally made food compromises decentralised autonomy and community control. They also detract from local livelihoods and take away the option of using local foods and recipes many of which have good nutritional value.

Way forward:-

- If the ICDS scheme, now called the Anganwadi Services Scheme, is to achieve better outcomes, it must focus on the provision of physical infrastructure and funding, besides closer monitoring of the nutrition mission.
- To accelerate the pace of progress, POSHAN Abhiyaan should rigorously measure levels of access and quality of nutrition, and publish the data periodically.
- Management of children with Severe acute malnutrition requires a comprehensive family-centric approach involving caregivers, instead of a food-centric approach
- The civil society groups also called for a system that provides training and support to local groups to deliver nutritious and hygienic food.
- A more holistic solution is needed, which includes counselling on breastfeeding and family planning to ensure low birth weight babies are not born, and proper functioning of anganwadis so that at least regular meals are provided to children.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Answer the following Questions

1. The benefits accrued on account of Saubhagya scheme should be utilised to address the issue of clean cooking fuel once and for all. Examine. (250 words)
2. Discuss the Objectives of National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA), India's flagship programme that aims to make Indian villages climate-proof. Also, discuss the issues affecting the programme that need to be resolved. (250 words)