

Civil society asks govt to treat acute malnutrition as medical emergency

30 November -0001 | News | By Rahul Koul Koul

Civil society asks govt to treat acute malnutrition as medical emergency



It is a bitter truth that despite a rapidly growing economy, every year close to 1 million children die from severe acute malnutrition in India. This means nearly one child death every thirty seconds. These children suffer from extreme hunger; they have low weight and swelling. Yet this disease is entirely treatable and preventable- children who cannot eat normal food anymore need specific treatment.

Keeping this in view, ACF-India (Action Contre La Faim-Action Against Hunger) and Fight Hunger Foundation, on January 20, 2015, launched the "Generation Nutrition Campaign" with a vision to end child deaths from acute malnutrition in India. The launch was marked by an event, "Acute Malnutrition - An Everyday Emergency", inaugurated by Mr Sudarshan Bhagat, union minister of state for rural development. At the event, ACF-India, also, launched the "Acute Malnutrition: An Everyday Emergency" reports from Burhanpur District, Madhya Pradesh and Baran District, Rajasthan. These reports throw light on the malnutrition situation in the two districts analyzing the infant mortality rates and child deaths due to conditions which are preventable.

In his keynote address, Mr Sudarshan Bhagat, mentioned, "Malnutrition is a big challenge for the entire global community. In India, 42 percent children are underweight in proportion to their age and 52 percent children look younger than their actual age. The Government of India is taking these issues very seriously. Nutrition and education are the birth rights of every child in India. Government is currently implementing several initiatives and programs to address the problems of hunger and malnutrition at district and block levels. As reiterated by the Prime Minister of India on several occasions, our national mission or 'Abhiyan' is to build a modern India where poverty and malnutrition are eradicated. I intend to take the outcomes of this conference directly to the Prime Minister and other authorities".

The campaign urges the government to recognize Severe Acute Malnutrition as a medical emergency and take urgent preventive action to avert India's nutrition crisis. Senior members of ACF-India, Fight Hunger Foundation and prominent partner organizations - MSF-India, Water Aid-India, Sphere-India, World Vision-India, Rotary International, The Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security appealed for action to the minister, urging the government of India to recognize severe acute

malnutrition as a medical emergency; improve and scale up detection and management of severe acute malnutrition; allow adapted treatment at community level; improve governance and nutrition surveillance and commit and plan to reduce acute malnutrition.

Dr Rajiv Tandon, deputy country director, ACF-India, said, "At the onset, we are extremely honored to see the initiatives taken by Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, in the areas of development, governance and social sector reforms. Severe Acute malnutrition is a medical emergency today with an alarming about 80 lakh children in India suffering from it. We appeal to the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister to take urgent action to address the issue of Severe Acute malnutrition to ensure that these children who are mostly in rural and tribal areas of India survive and thrive. We request the government to ensure adequate budget allocations, appropriate policies, convergent action at block level for implementing quality programs equitably. This will help in improving the social infrastructure and human capital in India".

Mr Thomas Gonnet, executive director, ACF-India, set an urgent context for the issue of malnutrition in India: "India is one of the top five high burden countries for acute malnutrition. I believe that a collaborative approach involving governments, civil society organizations such as ACF, the Fight Hunger Foundation and others, and the international communities will be a strong force to make the world free of child deaths from acute malnutrition within a generation. Everyone can engage in the campaign, by signing the petition to call world leaders to set up international targets for reduction of acute malnutrition. Find out more at generation-nutrition.org".