

Hunger in India states 'alarming'



Twelve Indian states have "alarming" levels of hunger while the situation is "extremely alarming" in the state of Madhya Pradesh, says a new report.

Madhya Pradesh's nutrition problems, it says, are comparable to the African countries of Ethiopia and Chad.

India has more people suffering hunger - a figure above 200 million - than any other country in the world, it says.

The report, released as part of the 2008 Global Hunger Index, ranks India at 66 out of 88 countries.

'Scored worse'

The hunger index has been released by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) along with Welthungerhilfe and the University of California.

It measures hunger on three indicators which include child malnutrition, rates of child mortality and the number of people who are calorie deficient.

The problem of hunger is measured in five categories - low, moderate, serious, alarming or extremely alarming.

The survey says that not one of the 17 states in India that were studied were in the low or moderate hunger category.

"Despite years of robust economic growth, India scored worse than nearly 25 sub-Saharan African countries and all of South Asia, except Bangladesh," the report says.

The best performing state was Punjab, which has a 'serious' hunger problem and does less well than developing countries such as Gabon, Vietnam and Honduras.

"When Indian states are compared to countries in the Global Hunger Index, [the central Indian state of] Madhya Pradesh ranks between Ethiopia and Chad," it says.

India is long known to have some of the highest rates of child malnutrition and mortality in under-fives in the world.

According to the Indian government statistics two years ago, around 60% of more than 10 million children in the state were malnourished.

Nutrition experts say the abysmal record is due to an inadequate access to food, poor feeding practices and poor childcare practices in India.

And now the rise in the global food prices has reduced the food-buying capacity of many poor families, making their situation worse.

In the past year food prices have increased significantly, but people's incomes haven't kept pace, forcing many families further into hunger, experts say.

The report says "improving child nutrition is of utmost urgency in most Indian states".

"All states also need to improve strategies to facilitate inclusive economic growth, ensure food sufficiency and reduce child mortality," it adds.

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