

POSHAN GHAR OP-ED

Bringing Stakeholders Together For Anaemia

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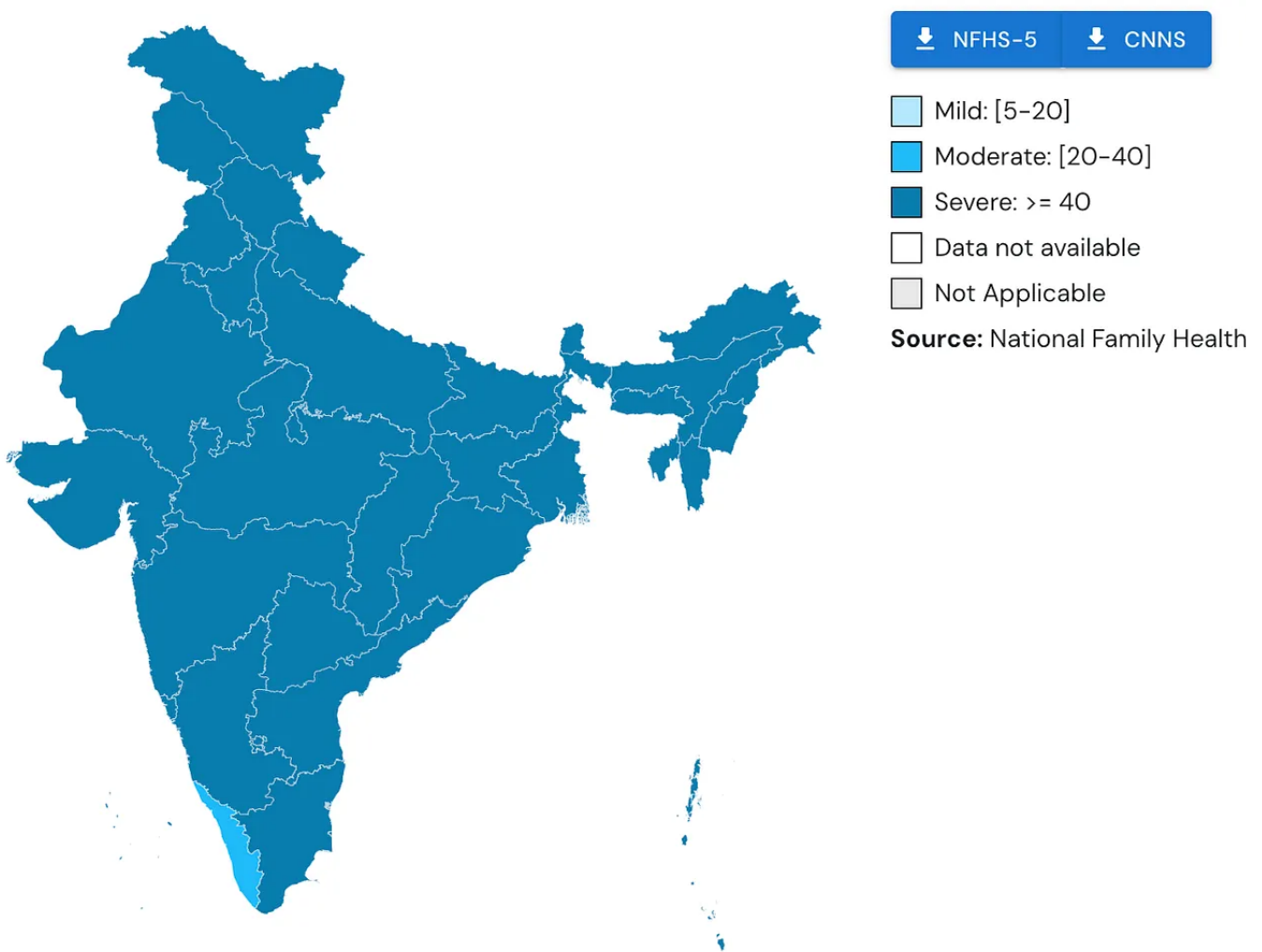
The op-ed highlights that anaemia remains a silent enemy, significantly impacting India's health and productivity, with women, children, and adolescents bearing the heaviest burden. This calls for broader, holistic approaches and actions to address nutritional, social, and cultural factors contributing to anaemia. The op-ed also stresses that achieving sustainable results requires effective cross-sectoral collaboration, collective action, effective implementation, and robust monitoring systems.

Imagine a young girl too exhausted to attend school or a pregnant woman struggling with complications. Anaemia, a silent enemy, drains life, productivity, and one's potential, yet anaemia is often reduced to a mere deficiency of haemoglobin. This narrow view limits our understanding of the silent problem and hinders efforts to address its deeper root causes.

Anaemia: More Than a Lack of Iron

Anaemia is not just about iron deficiency. UNICEF's 2022 report on adolescents aged 10–19 in India highlights how factors such as micronutrient deficiencies, chronic infections, poor sanitation, and socio-economic barriers drive this [challenge](#). It affects nearly half of India's population, with women, children

adolescents bearing the heaviest burden. In some states, nearly 60% of adolescents are anaemic, with girls disproportionately affected due to menstrual health management, early marriages, lack of access to iron-rich healthy diets, poor nutritional awareness, economic hardships, and restrictive cultural and social [practices](#). Ineffective implementation of programmes like folic acid supplementation and deworming campaigns further compound the issue. Addressing this requires collective holistic approaches to bridge gaps in nutrition, hygiene, healthcare, and social [equity](#).



Anaemia status among all women 15-19 years of age (Source: [AMB](#))

Why the Current Approach Falls Short

India has made notable progress in addressing anaemia through initiatives like *Anaemia Mukta Bharat* (AMB). The programme implements a 6x6x6 strategy

combining iron-folic acid supplementation, deworming, nutrition education, fortification, and anaemia-focused health camps. It also tackles non-nut causes, including malaria prevention and sickle cell anaemia.

However, progress remains uneven. While some states show improvement, regions still face high anaemia rates as a fragmented approach weakens impact. For instance, entrenched gender [norms](#), which prioritise men's nutrition over women's, undermine dietary interventions. In many households, women eat last, eat less, and consume smaller [portions](#), leaving their nutrient needs unmet and limiting the effectiveness of dietary and supplementation [programmes](#). Therefore, integrating Social and Behavior Change (SBC) into nutrition programmes is essential to directly challenge and transform such deeply rooted social and gender norms that perpetuate inequities in food and nutrition.

Practical Solutions Rooted in Reality

Addressing anaemia requires collective holistic approaches that tackle both nutritional and systemic barriers. For instance, Kerala's [Kudumbashree](#) Model demonstrates how empowering women can transform nutrition outcomes. This program links self-help groups with income generation, agriculture, and education, enabling women to improve household diets and gain financial independence. For instance, initiatives like community-based nutrition gardens have allowed women to produce diverse and affordable foods, improving dietary diversity while generating income. A [study](#) by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy highlights Kudumbashree's success in reducing poverty and improving food security. Expanding this model nationally with context-specific modifications can significantly enhance health and nutrition outcomes.

Similarly, expanding the Mid-Day Meal Scheme to include adolescents and young children above could address their critical dietary needs. Adolescents face unique challenges that are often overlooked, such as the influence of peer pressure, dietary misconceptions, and gender norms. Programmes like SABLA, Ra

Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, and POSHAN Abhiyaan aim to instil healthy habits and promote dietary diversity through peer education and community [approaches](#). However, these initiatives require stronger integration with health systems and local governance to ensure sustainability.

Source: UNICEF India

Cultural and behavioural change initiatives must also address entrenched norms. Practices like women eating last and consuming the least nutritious undermine nutrition efforts. Strategies such as community dialogues, media engagement programmes, and leveraging local leaders can shift attitudes and promote equitable food [distribution](#). Expanding the fortification of grains in the Public Distribution System can address widespread micronutrient deficiencies. Coordinated efforts across ministries, local governments, and communities are necessary to make these interventions effective.

These interconnected strategies—centred on community engagement, policy reform, and policy innovation—offer a holistic approach to addressing anaemia.

malnutrition. However, achieving meaningful outcomes requires effective implementation, participatory feedback systems, and robust monitoring evaluation frameworks.

Bringing Stakeholders Together for *Anaemia Bharat*

Addressing anaemia demands collective action from governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, and communities. National campaigns have shown that outcomes improve when local leaders and community health workers actively participate. SBC initiatives must operate at multiple levels leveraging platforms like Poshan Ghar for nationwide stakeholder mobilisation, social media campaigns, utilising Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Days for community engagement, and supporting targeted grassroots awareness drives by NGOs.

CSR initiatives can fund localised health and nutrition programmes, while design and implement community-driven interventions aligned with state and national health priorities. To create a comprehensive strategy, these efforts also address dietary diversity and tackle other micronutrient deficiencies like vitamin A and zinc. Through coordinated cross-sectoral partnerships and actions, stakeholders can build an ecosystem that drives progress towards anaemia and achieving the vision of Anaemia Mukta Bharat.

Have stories, insights, or case studies to share? We would love to hear from you. Reach out at arpita.d@zealgrit.com.

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