

Economic growth has little impact on reducing malnutrition in children: IIT study

Malathy Iyer, TNN | Mar 27, 2014, 01.39PM IST

MUMBAI: India's economic growth will unfortunately not help its millions of malnourished children, suggests a study from the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar.

The IIT was a part of a larger global health study conducted across 36 countries to assess the link between economic growth and undernutrition.

The study, published in The Lancet Global Health journal, has found that, contrary to widely held beliefs, economic growth is at best associated with very small, and in some cases no declines in levels of stunting, underweight, and wasting. This suggests that investment in interventions that directly impact health and nutrition are needed to tackle child undernutrition.

"Worldwide, malnutrition contributes to 2.6 million child deaths each year, or more than one in three of all child deaths. In 2011, an estimated 165 million children in developing countries were affected by stunting and 101 million children were underweight," said a press release sent by the Lancet.

The press release also quoted Professor S V Subramanian from the Harvard School of Public Health as saying: "Our findings suggest that the contribution of economic growth to the reduction of undernutrition in children in developing countries is very small, if it exists at all. The importance of a 'support-led' strategy focusing directly on nutrition-related interventions, as well as interventions that improve the overall living circumstances that would reduce infection (for example, improving basic public health infrastructure such as water, sanitation) is of prime importance as opposed to relying solely on a 'growth-mediated' strategy."

At the individual level, the study found a 5% increase in per-head GDP was associated with a very small reduction in the odds of being stunted (0.4%), underweight (1.1%), or wasted (1.7%).