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UN report shows daunting figures regarding health & nutrition in APAC

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According to a recent United Nations report, around 3 billion people across the globe cannot afford a healthy diet; 1.9 billion of those are in the Asia-Pacific region. Of the 1.9 billion people, 1.3 billion live in southern Asia, 325.5 million in south-east Asia, 230 million in eastern Asia and 0.5 million in Oceania.



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A nutritionally sufficient diet tends to cost Rs 145-220 ($2 to $3) per day in most countries, poor or richer but is more expensive in South Korea and Japan. The region's poor have suffered the most from the onslaught of crises in 2020 and have been forced to opt for less nutritious and cheaper foods, the report said.

As a result, progress on nutrition and food security, one of the key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2030, has been hindered.

More than 350 million people in the Asia-Pacific region were under-fed and undernourished in 2019 (which is half of the global total). Around 75 million children under 5 were stunted (too short for their age) and 31.5 million children were 'wasted' (too thin for their height). The majority of these children (25.2 million wasted and 55.9 million stunted) live in southern Asia.

At the same time, the number of obese and overweight children increased quickly, especially in the Pacific and South-Eastern Asia. Studies found that an estimated 14.5 million children under 5 were obese or overweight. The study has been jointly published by the UN Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme.

The effects of a poor diet are most severe in the first 1,000 days of human life. In India, just 42% of children aged 6-23 months are fed the necessary number of times per day.

Anaemia in children under 5 remains a public health issue across the Pacific and Asia, in spite of significant improvements in anaemia status in many nations (India, Iran, Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, Vanuatu and Philippines)

The report also highlights the changing image of malnutrition with inexpensive and highly processed foods readily available across Asia and the Pacific.

Often packed with sugar and unhealthy fats, such food products lack the minerals and vitamins required for development and growth and also increase the risk of diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular diseases.