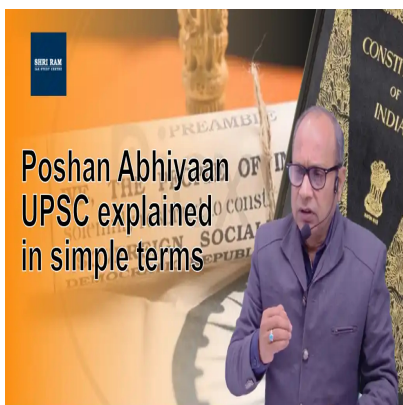




## Poshan Abhiyaan UPSC explained in simple terms

### Description

India has grappled with the persistent challenge of malnutrition for decades, affecting millions of children and women across the nation. This complex issue manifests as stunting, wasting, and anaemia, impacting not just individual health but also the overall human development index and economic productivity of the country. Addressing this requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach that goes beyond mere food provision.

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of this problem and the need for a targeted, time-bound intervention, the government launched a flagship program. This initiative aims to improve nutritional outcomes by leveraging technology, convergence among various departments, and extensive community participation, marking a significant national commitment to tackling malnutrition holistically. For aspirants preparing for the [Union Public Service Commission \(UPSC\)](#) examinations, understanding this program's intricacies is essential.

## Understanding Poshan Abhiyaan

Poshan Abhiyaan, also known as the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition, was launched in 2018. The initiative is spearheaded by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, operating with a mission-mode approach to reduce malnutrition in a phased manner. It represents a significant policy shift towards a more integrated and outcome-oriented strategy for nutritional well-being.

The core idea behind Poshan Abhiyaan is not just to provide supplementary nutrition but to address the underlying determinants of malnutrition through a life-cycle approach. This involves focusing on the crucial 1000-day window, spanning from conception to a child's second birthday, which is critical for physical and cognitive development. The Abhiyaan seeks to bring together various programs and schemes to create a cohesive ecosystem that supports better nutrition.

## Understanding India's Nutrition Challenge

India's nutrition challenge is profound and deeply rooted in socio-economic factors. Data consistently reveals high prevalence rates of stunting (low height-for-age), wasting (low weight-for-height), and underweight (low weight-for-age) among children under five years. Anaemia is another widespread concern, affecting a significant proportion of women of reproductive age, adolescent girls, and young children.

The factors contributing to this challenge are diverse. These include inadequate dietary intake, poor access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, limited awareness about optimal feeding and care practices, early marriages and pregnancies, and gender disparities in nutrition. Furthermore, the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, where undernourished mothers give birth to low birth-weight babies, perpetuates the problem. The economic consequences of malnutrition are substantial, leading to reduced productivity, increased healthcare costs, and hindered national development. Addressing this complex web of issues requires a sustained and coordinated effort, which Poshan Abhiyaan aims to provide.

## Poshan Abhiyaan's Aims and Targets

Poshan Abhiyaan sets ambitious yet crucial targets for improving nutritional indicators across the country. The primary aims are focused on the reduction of stunting, underweight, and anaemia among various demographic groups. A key analytical observation here is the specific, measurable nature of these targets, reflecting a commitment to tangible results.

The specific national targets set initially include:

- Reducing stunting by 2% per year.
- Reducing underweight by 2% per year.
- Reducing anaemia among young children by 2% per year.
- Reducing anaemia among adolescent girls and pregnant women by 3% per year.

The overall goal of the Abhiyaan was to reduce stunting among children from 38.4% (as per NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022. This time-bound target emphasizes the urgency with which the government aims to tackle the issue. The focus on specific annual reduction rates is designed to ensure continuous monitoring and corrective actions. These targets signify a departure from previous approaches, which sometimes lacked such clear, quantifiable goals.

## Core Strategies of Poshan Abhiyaan

Poshan Abhiyaan employs a multi-pronged strategy to achieve its nutritional objectives, moving beyond traditional service delivery models. These strategies aim to create an enabling environment for improved nutritional outcomes.

### Technology-enabled Real-time Monitoring

One of the most significant strategies is the adoption of technology for real-time monitoring. The ICDS-Common Application Software (ICDS-CAS) is a digital platform designed to enable Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) to capture data on a daily basis. This includes growth monitoring of children, tracking services

provided, and managing beneficiary data. This point needs attention: the use of technology aims to reduce manual record-keeping, improve data accuracy, and provide supervisors with up-to-date information for timely interventions. This shift helps in identifying areas that require immediate support and assessing program effectiveness at a granular level.

## **Convergence and Inter-sectoral Action**

A crucial aspect of Poshan Abhiyaan is its emphasis on convergence. Malnutrition is a multi-sectoral problem, and its solutions lie in the coordinated efforts of various ministries and departments. The Abhiyaan brings together the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Education, and others. This ensures that interventions related to sanitation, health services, food security, and education are integrated and delivered effectively. This strategy recognizes that a child's nutritional status is influenced by factors beyond just food intake.

## **Behavioural Change Communication (BCC) and Community Mobilisation**

For sustainable change in nutritional practices, a strong focus on Behavioural Change Communication (BCC) and community mobilization is vital. Poshan Abhiyaan promotes a "Jan Andolan" or a people's movement, encouraging active participation from communities. This involves promoting key behaviours such as breastfeeding, complementary feeding, handwashing, sanitation practices, and seeking timely health services. Anganwadi centres serve as crucial platforms for disseminating information and fostering community engagement. This approach understands that knowledge and awareness are fundamental for adopting healthier practices at the household level.

## **Capacity Building and Incentives**

Strengthening the capacities of frontline workers, particularly Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and ASHA workers, is another core strategy. Regular training programs are conducted to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively deliver nutrition services, counsel beneficiaries, and use technology. Furthermore, the Abhiyaan incorporates performance-based incentives for AWWs for achieving specific targets and using the ICDS-CAS efficiently. This aims to motivate the frontline workforce and improve the quality of service delivery.

## **Implementation, Progress, and Key Challenges**

Poshan Abhiyaan is implemented through a multi-tier governance structure, from the national level to the village level. A National Council on Nutrition, chaired by the Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog, provides policy guidance. At the operational level, state and district-level committees oversee implementation, with Anganwadi Workers as the primary interface at the grassroots.

## **Progress and Impact**

Since its inception, Poshan Abhiyaan has led to several positive developments. There has been an increased focus on data collection and monitoring through the ICDS-CAS, providing a clearer picture of

nutritional status and service delivery gaps. The Abhiyaan has successfully generated significant awareness regarding nutrition and health practices through its Jan Andolan component. While achieving the original targets by 2022 proved challenging due to various factors including the COVID-19 pandemic, the initiative has contributed to a greater prioritization of nutrition on the national agenda and facilitated greater inter-ministerial coordination. Early indicators from various surveys have shown some positive shifts in certain nutritional parameters, suggesting the long-term potential of this sustained effort.

## Key Challenges

Despite its comprehensive design, Poshan Abhiyaan faces several challenges in its implementation.

- **Data Integrity and Connectivity:** Ensuring reliable internet connectivity and proper functioning of smartphones for AWWs, especially in remote areas, remains an issue. The accuracy and completeness of data entry are also critical for effective monitoring.
- **Sustaining Convergence:** While convergence is a core strategy, ensuring sustained coordination and joint action across different ministries and departments at the ground level can be complex and requires continuous effort. Bureaucratic silos can sometimes impede integrated service delivery.
- **Behavioral Change Resistance:** Bringing about deep-seated behavioral change in communities is a long-term process. Cultural practices, traditional beliefs, and socio-economic realities can pose resistance to adopting new nutritional and hygiene practices.
- **Funding and Resource Allocation:** Adequate and timely allocation and utilization of funds remain a concern. Ensuring that resources reach the grassroots level efficiently is vital for program effectiveness.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Despite training efforts, frontline workers may still face challenges in understanding complex nutritional guidelines or effectively counseling beneficiaries, especially given their extensive workload.
- **Socio-economic Determinants:** The Abhiyaan, while comprehensive, operates within the broader socio-economic context. Addressing fundamental issues like poverty, food security, and women's empowerment, which directly impact nutrition, requires broader policy interventions beyond the scope of this single program.

## UPSC Perspective

Understanding Poshan Abhiyaan is crucial for both Prelims and Mains examinations.

### Prelims focus:

- Launch Year: 2018.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- Primary Goal: Holistic nutrition, reduce stunting, underweight, anaemia.
- Key Components: ICDS-CAS, Jan Andolan, Convergence.
- Target Groups: Children (0-6 years), adolescent girls, pregnant women, lactating mothers.
- Specific Targets: Percentage reduction for stunting, underweight, anaemia.

## Mains focus:

- **Role of Technology:** Discuss the significance of ICDS-CAS in real-time monitoring, data-driven decision making, and improving accountability. Analyze its advantages and limitations.
- **Inter-sectoral Convergence:** Explain how the multi-ministerial approach addresses the multi-faceted nature of malnutrition. Provide examples of how different ministries contribute.
- **Behavioral Change Communication (BCC):** Discuss the importance of community participation and Jan Andolan in achieving sustainable nutritional outcomes. Analyze strategies for effective BCC.
- **Challenges and Solutions:** Elaborate on the implementation challenges such as data accuracy, convergence issues, funding, and behavioral resistance. Suggest potential solutions or policy recommendations.
- **Significance for Human Development:** Connect Poshan Abhiyaan to India's human development goals, gender equality, and sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).
- **Role of Frontline Workers:** Examine the pivotal role of Anganwadi Workers and ASHA workers in the scheme's success and the need for their continuous capacity building and incentivization.

## Common Student Confusion

**Misunderstanding:** Many students often confuse Poshan Abhiyaan as a scheme that *replaces* the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme.

**Correction:** This is incorrect. Poshan Abhiyaan does not replace ICDS; rather, it acts as an **enabler and energizer** for the ICDS scheme. It leverages the existing ICDS infrastructure, including Anganwadi Centres and Anganwadi Workers, to deliver its objectives. The Abhiyaan strengthens and reforms ICDS by introducing technology, convergence, and a stronger focus on outcomes, thereby making ICDS more effective and efficient. It uses ICDS-CAS, not replaces ICDS itself.

## Short Revision Points

- **Launch:** 2018, Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- **Goal:** Improve nutritional outcomes, reduce stunting, underweight, anaemia.
- **Approach:** Mission-mode, life-cycle, focus on 1000 days.
- **Key Strategies:** Technology (ICDS-CAS), Convergence, Jan Andolan (BCC), Capacity Building.
- **Targets:** Annual reduction rates for key indicators; reduce stunting to 25% by 2022 (original goal).
- **Frontline:** Anganwadi Workers, ASHA.

## FAQs

### 1. What is the primary goal of Poshan Abhiyaan?

The primary goal is to improve nutritional outcomes for children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers by reducing stunting, underweight, and anaemia in a time-bound

manner.

**2. Which ministry is responsible for implementing Poshan Abhiyaan?**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal ministry responsible for the implementation of Poshan Abhiyaan.

**3. What are the key target groups under the Abhiyaan?**

The key target groups include children (0-6 years), adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers, with a special emphasis on the first 1000 days of a child's life.

Poshan Abhiyaan stands as a testament to India's commitment to creating a healthier, well-nourished generation. Its multi-pronged approach, encompassing technology, inter-sectoral convergence, and community mobilization, provides a robust framework for tackling the pervasive issue of malnutrition. For [UPSC aspirants](#), a thorough understanding of Poshan Abhiyaan's objectives, strategies, and challenges is not merely academic but a reflection of critical policy awareness. Such knowledge is diligently imparted through comprehensive teaching at institutions like [SHRI RAM IAS](#), which is widely regarded as the best [IAS coaching in Delhi](#), ensuring aspirants are well-equipped to analyze and articulate these crucial national programs.