

## Panel Briefing

### **The Elephant Moves: #TheIndiaDialog 2024** **Institute for Competitiveness | US-Asia Technology Management Center,** **Stanford University**

#### ***“Health and Nutrition”***

#### **Introduction**

India operates a centralised, health insurance-based system covering 37% of the population primarily through public insurance. Concurrently, food distribution is decentralised, with a \$750 billion public distribution system purchasing 30% of the country's grain, distributed at subsidised rates by states through fair-price shops. Despite these efforts, approximately 190 million people face food insecurity, necessitating enhanced nutrition strategies like fortifying grains. The panel discussion on ‘Health and Nutrition’ explored these challenges and examined India's progress in healthcare and nutrition, alongside recent reforms and structural changes required to address inequality and foster a healthier population. Moderated by Richard Dasher, Director of US ATMC, the panel included Neeraj Jain, Country Director of India and South Asia at PATH; Mukesh Bansal, CEO and co-founder of CureFit; Anurag Mairal, Director of Global Outreach at Byers Center for Biodesign at Stanford University; and Mark Esposito, Faculty Associate at Harvard's Center for International Development at HKS.

#### **For-Profit Innovation in Healthcare**

The panel explored how for-profit innovation impacts healthcare. Mukesh illuminated Curefit's goal of integrating health aspects to encourage preventive measures and healthier lifestyles. He discussed Curefit's success as India's largest fitness company and stressed the need for more efforts from both private and government sectors to raise awareness and empower people towards healthier living. Mukesh proudly highlighted Curefit's success in attracting subscribers and promoting healthier lifestyles.

The panel agreed on the importance of for-profit solutions, citing consumer demand as a driving factor. Mukesh backed this up by underlining the necessity to boost active individuals in India, aiming for 100 million engaging in physical activity beyond the current 4% of gym-goers.

The conversation emphasised the increasing importance of promoting awareness about movement and healthy lifestyles, especially with rising incomes and unhealthy habits. It also highlighted the urgency for proactive policies, consumer education, and preventive measures to tackle lifestyle-related diseases like obesity and diabetes in India.

Overall, the discussion underscored the significant role of for-profit innovation in addressing healthcare challenges and fostering healthier communities. It also touched on whether India would shift from a self-pay healthcare model to a coverage-based one, similar to other nations.

The panel noted India's evolving healthcare landscape, with improving quality in public health facilities impacting patient preferences. They observed that over 50% of hospital payments now come through insurance, particularly in major cities, with this trend on the rise. Furthermore,

insurance coverage is expanding to include outpatient care, driven by startups and existing insurance players. However, the panel cautioned against blindly adopting foreign models, stressing the need for India to develop its own tailored approach to healthcare challenges and opportunities. They highlighted initiatives like the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, also known as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), and proposed a balanced approach integrating both public and private efforts.

### **Public-Private Collaboration on Nutrition Challenges**

The panel discussion underscored the effectiveness of fortification programs in addressing public health challenges, with organisations like PATH supporting government initiatives. It emphasised the interconnectedness of various developmental factors and stressed the necessity for holistic approaches to effectively tackle India's complex challenges. Additionally, the discussion highlighted the crucial role of local health workers like Asha workers and recognised the importance of addressing their incentives and support systems for efficient public health delivery.

Expanding on this theme, the panel discussed the role of innovation in addressing structural inequities and enhancing health outcomes for underserved communities. They identified ABDM as a platform for scalable interventions, empowering individuals in low-income communities to access quality healthcare and adopt healthier lifestyles.

Representing PATH, Neeraj illuminated the successful scale-up of rice fortification in India's public distribution system. He emphasised PATH's role in providing technical support and creating evidence to facilitate program rollout, focusing on quality assurance through digital monitoring.

The necessity for research and innovation to navigate the transition to sustainable development while mitigating climate change impacts, particularly in agriculture, was underscored. The panel discussed the potential consequences of climate change on food production and nutrition, citing examples like decreased protein content in rice due to rising temperatures.

The importance of behaviour change for preventive healthcare emerged as a central theme, with suggestions to incorporate incentives for proactive health behaviours in ABDM, aligning with global insurance trends. This approach aims to make preventive measures more cost-effective and accessible to all income levels.

While there is a declining reliance on private healthcare in India, indicating a growing trust in the public health system, the private sector still has a significant role to play in public health initiatives. The successful TB program in Mumbai slums serves as an example, emphasising the importance of finding incentives for private-sector engagement while aligning with public health goals. However, challenges surrounding regulation and data privacy in digital health policies need to be addressed to fully leverage the private sector's potential in bridging health equity gaps.

The panel highlighted a significant regulatory concern in healthcare, focusing on the cost of drugs, overuse of medications, drug regulation, and the role of hospitals within the healthcare system. When considering the sustainability of pricing disparities between public and private sector drug procurements in India, it becomes apparent that a dual system of healthcare provision exists, comprising both public and private sectors. Consequently, there arises a pressing imperative to bolster supply chain and procurement mechanisms. Additionally, there is a challenge of

unregulated private practitioners exacerbating health issues like drug-resistant TB, emphasising the need for stronger regulation in healthcare delivery.

While strides have been made to overhaul the supply chain through collaboration with the private sector, persistent challenges persist, particularly concerning payment delays that adversely impact private-sector operations. Overall, the conversation highlights the complexities of private sector involvement in public health, emphasising the need for incentives, regulation, and support mechanisms to achieve equitable healthcare access.

### **Impact of Technology on Health and Nutrition in India**

The integration of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) with health and nutrition initiatives in India for international development was a key focus of the discussion. Anurag underscored the pivotal role of innovation in reshaping healthcare delivery in India, particularly highlighting the impact of the Byers Center for Biodesign at Stanford University in fostering health technology innovation. He noted significant progress over the years, with thousands of innovators and hundreds of companies emerging from the program, including the successful incubation of 300 Indian healthcare companies, 75 of which have been commercialised. Anurag emphasised the transformative potential of these innovations in reforming India's healthcare landscape, emphasising their capacity to bring healthcare services closer to communities and households. He identified challenges such as talent acquisition and the need for frameworks to integrate innovations into the public health system, outlining key areas for further development.

Mark Esposito underscored the transformative potential of digital technologies in enhancing governance, efficiency, and economic prospects within the public sector. Drawing attention to notable examples of private sector innovations in India, such as leveraging mobile banking for nutritional education in slum areas and employing AI technology for early breast cancer detection, Esposito advocated for a more cohesive alignment between DPI and health/nutrition initiatives. He articulated the potential of this convergence to harness social determinants for fostering economic growth and societal well-being.

In India, it is imperative to adopt a balanced approach to addressing concerns regarding regulation and data privacy. This entails incentivising innovation while simultaneously implementing strong regulatory frameworks within public health interventions. It is crucial to emphasise the delicate balance between fostering innovation and safeguarding data privacy to uphold the efficacy and integrity of healthcare initiatives in the country.

### **Future of Health and Nutrition in India**

The panel delved into envisioning the future of healthcare in India, emphasising the transformative role of technology and innovation in addressing systemic challenges. Two key aspirations emerged for the next decade: transitioning towards community-centred care facilitated by technology, empowering frontline workers like Asha workers, and positioning India as a global leader in health technologies, akin to its success in vaccine production. This approach aims to reduce burdens on higher-level care facilities and enhance accessibility to healthcare nationwide. Additionally, there's an emphasis on bending the cost-outcome curve through innovation to make healthcare more affordable and accessible globally. The discussion underscored the critical role of innovation and technology in shaping the future of healthcare delivery and access worldwide.

Repurposing drug manufacturing capacity to meet contemporary demands, including novel pharmaceutical development and climate-resilient disease mitigation, holds significant promise. India, with its unique position in international relations and substantial pharmaceutical production scale, stands poised to lead research and development efforts aimed at addressing climate change-induced diseases. Moreover, research and innovation are essential to tackle the dual challenges of transitioning to sustainable development and addressing the impacts of climate change, particularly in agriculture. Given the potential consequences on food production and nutrition, such as decreased protein content in rice due to rising temperatures, urgent action is warranted.

Overall, the panel emphasised the **intersectionality of India's development challenges, particularly regarding public-private collaboration, climate change, technology, and socioeconomic inequality, and how they all impact health and nutrition outcomes.**