

EDITORIALS - 29TH SEP 2026

1. Tackling food loss and waste — India's opportunity (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'Tackling food loss and waste — India's opportunity' was published in **The Hindu** on 29th Sep 2026, highlights how reducing food loss and waste can strengthen **food security**, **conserve resources** and **improve incomes**.

Food Security and Evidence Gaps

- Despite producing enough food for 1.4 billion people, India loses significant produce across the value chain; reducing losses improves **food security**, resource conservation, emissions, incomes and **productivity**.
- India alone has conducted three national **post-harvest loss surveys**, covering 45, 45 and 54 commodities in 2005–07, 2012–14 and 2020–22, respectively, from farm to retail; a **fourth round** is underway.
- These surveys support **Food Loss Index** reporting under the Sustainable Development Goals, but mainly cover farm and supply-chain losses; **food-waste data** for retail, hospitality and households remain inadequate.

Loss Prevention and Resource Recovery

- Better storage, drying, cooling, moisture management and processing offer the greatest scope for **loss reduction**; digital **traceability systems** improve food movement and supply-chain management.
- Integrating loss reduction into agricultural planning, food processing, climate action and **investment decisions** can target high-impact infrastructure while ensuring **affordability and access** for farmers, producer organisations and small businesses.
- **Circular approaches** combine surplus-food redistribution with conversion of unavoidable organic residues into compost, biogas or energy, reducing waste and creating **economic value**.
- Assessments by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and National Council of State Agricultural Marketing Boards estimate **wholesale-market waste** at up to 100 tonnes daily per major market and 3.5 million tonnes nationally annually; treatment could offset roughly **3.3 million tonnes of CO₂-equivalent emissions**, worth nearly \$30 million in carbon credits.
- Surat's privately operated, 50-tonne-a-day **bio-CNG plant**, running for over five years, reportedly cuts methane-related emissions by about **7,500 tonnes annually**; replication requires locally adapted infrastructure, waste segregation, collection, treatment and markets for recovered products.

Finance and Coordinated Implementation

- A **national approach** needs financing at its core: FAO identifies food-loss hotspots and suitable technologies, while the **Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)**

arranges finance for small and medium enterprises to adopt drying, moisture-control, efficient cooling and storage solutions.

- FAO's proposed **Package of Practices** will support **municipalities** in measuring, preventing, reducing, redistributing and recovering value from waste across households, wholesale markets, retail and food services.

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Behavioural Drivers of Food Waste

- **Excess purchasing:** Impulse buying creates avoidable surplus; the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recommends meal planning and shopping lists to prevent purchases beyond household needs.
- **Portion mismatch:** Oversized servings increase leftovers; the United Kingdom's Love Food Hate Waste campaign provides a portion calculator to help consumers prepare appropriate quantities.
- **Date-label confusion:** Mistaking quality dates for safety deadlines encourages premature disposal; FAO distinguishes "best before" labels from safety-related "use-by" dates.
- **Appearance bias:** Cosmetic preferences lead to rejection of edible produce; the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Think.Eat.Save campaign encourages purchasing irregularly shaped fruits and vegetables.
- **Hospitality norms:** Abundance-centred celebrations can encourage over-preparation; UNEP's Sustainable Ramadan campaign promotes behavioural change to reduce food waste during festive meals.
- **Household routines:** Forgotten supplies increase spoilage; FAO recommends moving older products forward and placing newer purchases behind them to encourage timely consumption.
- **Undervaluing food:** Poor awareness of food's resource costs weakens waste prevention; WRAP's "Food's Not Rubbish" diary encourages households to record discarded food and recognise wasteful habits.

2. Gender disparities in contraceptive use and sterilisation (GS Paper I Society)

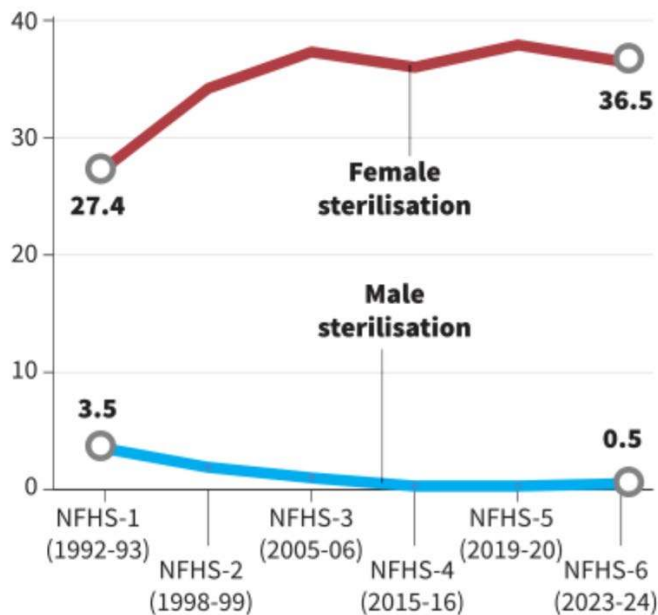
This editorial '**Gender disparities in contraceptive use and sterilisation**' was published in **The Hindu** on 29th Sep 2026, highlights persistent gender inequality in contraceptive **responsibility** despite India's **declining fertility**.

Fertility and Contraceptive Trends

- India's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** fell to 2.0 in 2021 and 1.9 in 2025, below replacement level; **unmet need** for family planning declined by one percentage point between the fifth and sixth National Family Health Surveys (NFHS).

- Among married women aged 15–49, **contraceptive use** rose from 66.7% to 69.1%, but **modern-method use** fell from 56.4% to 52.7%; traditional methods, mainly fertility awareness and withdrawal, increased from 10.3% to 16.4%.
- Reasons for increased **traditional-method use** remain unestablished; possible factors include side-effect concerns, convenience, privacy, partner preferences, access and avoidance of **hormonal or invasive methods**.

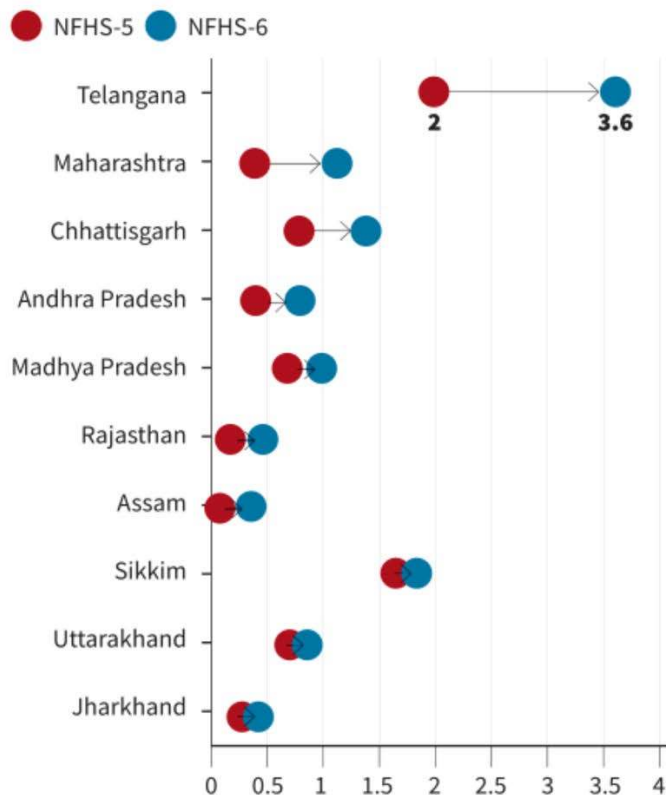
CHART 3: While the share of women undergoing sterilisation has increased, the same has dropped for men from the already abysmal level



Unequal Contraceptive Responsibility

- **Female sterilisation** declined marginally from 37.9% to 36.5%, while **male sterilisation** rose from 0.3% to 0.5%; women continue bearing disproportionate responsibility for temporary and permanent contraception.
- Over three decades, **female sterilisation** rose sharply before stabilising around 36–38%, while **vasectomy** became marginal; achieving low fertility has not eliminated this gender imbalance.
- **Male sterilisation** increased in 22 States between NFHS-5 and NFHS-6, but only **Telangana** recorded a rise exceeding one percentage point, from 2% to 3.6%; early low-fertility achievers also showed limited male participation.

CHART 4: The 10 States that recorded the highest increase in the share (%) of men using sterilisation as their method of contraception. The increase is miniscule as the chart shows



Expanding Contraceptive Choice

- Female sterilisation is not inherently unsafe, but **male sterilisation** requires a **less invasive procedure** and can be performed under local anaesthesia.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has introduced its first benchmarks for reversible male contraceptives, covering safety, effectiveness, acceptability and affordability; its research challenges assumptions that men would reject **new contraceptive options**.

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Reproductive Autonomy in Family Planning

- **Informed consent:** Sterilisation requires understandable information and voluntary choice; in *Devika Biswas v. Union of India* (2016), the Supreme Court affirmed reproductive freedom without coercion.
- **Freedom from coercion:** Institutional safeguards must prevent involuntary procedures; the 2014 joint United Nations statement on sterilisation requires full, free and informed individual decision-making.
- **Household bargaining:** Unequal power limits reproductive choice; the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) 2021 report found only 55% of women across 57 developing countries had autonomy across healthcare, contraception and sexual consent.

- **Inclusive access:** Marital-status restrictions undermine contraceptive autonomy; UNFPA's human-rights framework calls for removing non-medical barriers based on age, marriage or existing number of children.
- **Confidential care:** Fear of disclosure can discourage service use; the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2017 contraceptive-care checklist explicitly includes privacy and confidentiality safeguards.
- **Method flexibility:** Reproductive choice extends beyond initial acceptance; the WHO–UNFPA implementation guide includes removal services for long-acting reversible contraception and counselling on side effects.
- **Reproductive justice:** Disability-inclusive policymaking strengthens meaningful choice; UNFPA's 2021 report documents people with disabilities in Mongolia directly presenting their reproductive-health needs to government.

3. Women's safety falls through gap between intent and policy (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial '**Women's safety falls through gap between intent and policy**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 29th Sep 2026, highlights how weak **accountability**, inadequate **infrastructure** and low female **representation** undermine women's safety.

Policy Progress and Implementation Gaps

- Following the December 2012 Delhi gangrape, the **Nirbhaya Fund** and **workplace sexual-harassment legislation (2013)** strengthened the framework for women's safety.
- During 2015–2025, **₹5,846.08 crore** of ₹7,712.85 crore allocated under the Nirbhaya Fund was used, supporting nearly **15,000 women's helpdesks** and fast-track courts for rape cases.
- Chennai, Surat and Bhubaneswar established **gender labs** for safer urban design, but **safety audits** often lack corrective follow-up, exemplified by the unaddressed 500-metre unlit stretch behind Lady Shri Ram College.

Accountability and Institutional Capacity

- City agencies must demonstrate **accountability** through public reporting on audit-based repairs, helpline complaints and **crisis-response times**, rather than treating completed audits as outcomes.
- At least **eight States** offer free bus travel, but unpredictable waits and unsafe access routes limit safety gains; fare concessions cannot substitute for **gender-sensitive infrastructure**.
- Greater **female representation** in public-facing jobs can improve women's presence and safety in public spaces; Delhi's reduction of drivers' minimum height from 159 cm to 153 cm in **2022** enabled induction of 34 women bus drivers the following year.

- Recruitment reforms and representation targets must expand women's public-sector employment, especially in **policing**, where women constitute about **10%** of personnel against the Centre's 33% target.

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Social Norms Behind Gender-Based Violence

- **Male entitlement:** Unequal power can legitimise control over women; Uganda's SASA! Together approach engages communities in challenging power imbalances underlying violence against women.
- **Normalised harassment:** Treating sexual aggression as humour trivialises abuse; UN Women identifies rape jokes and language excusing harassment as practices sustaining rape culture.
- **Victim-blaming:** Blaming survivors discourages disclosure; UN Women identifies fear of retaliation, rejection, stigma and victim-blaming among barriers to reporting sexual abuse in Asia-Pacific.
- **Family honour:** Honour-based expectations can reinforce patriarchal control; Albania's 2018 national violence survey situates abuse within traditions of family hierarchy and honour-and-shame norms.
- **Restrictive upbringing:** Gender stereotypes learned early can normalise inequality; Breakthrough's Taaron Ki Toli programme engages adolescents in challenging discriminatory attitudes through school and community discussions.
- **Bystander silence:** Treating domestic violence as a private matter shields perpetrators; India's Bell Bajao campaign encourages men and boys to interrupt abuse rather than remain passive.
- **Consent education:** Early understanding of boundaries can challenge coercive attitudes; UNESCO's 2018 sexuality-education guidance includes age-appropriate lessons on consent, privacy and bodily integrity.