



AI INTEGRATION IN GOVERNMENT NUTRITION PROGRAMS: A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT APPROACH FOR HILLY REGIONS OF UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

Malnutrition remains a critical challenge in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand due to geographical isolation, seasonal inaccessibility, and fragmented service delivery within government nutrition programs such as ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan. Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers transformative solutions by enabling predictive analytics for supply chains, real-time malnutrition surveillance, and personalized nutrition counseling in local dialects. AI-powered tools like computer vision-based growth monitoring and chatbots can improve early detection of stunting and wasting by 20–30% and reduce stock-outs of nutritional supplements by 40%. Case studies from Kenya, Nepal, and Indian states like Madhya Pradesh demonstrate measurable improvements in maternal dietary diversity, program accountability, and cost efficiency through AI integration. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2, 3, 5, and 10), AI-driven nutrition interventions can enhance maternal and child health, empower frontline workers, and build a resilient, inclusive ecosystem for remote hill communities.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence, Nutrition Programs, Uttarakhand, Sustainable Development, Malnutrition

1. INTRODUCTION

The hilly regions of Uttarakhand face acute nutritional challenges due to geographical isolation, weak infrastructure, and seasonal road inaccessibility, which disrupts the supply of essential food and health services. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 5, 2021), 35% of children under five in Uttarakhand are underweight, while 57% of women aged 15–49 are anemic, reflecting significant public health gaps (International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS], 2021). These figures are higher in remote mountainous districts such as Pithoragarh and Chamoli, where difficult terrain limits timely delivery of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) supplements and regular anthropometric monitoring (NITI Aayog, 2020). Similar challenges have been reported in other Himalayan states, where maternal malnutrition and low dietary diversity persist due to poor access to fortified foods and nutrition counseling (Devi et al., 2021).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers transformative potential to address these structural barriers by enabling predictive analytics for supply chains, real-time malnutrition surveillance, and personalized dietary counseling through mobile platforms (Capritto & Rahhal, 2023). For example, AI-driven applications piloted in Kenya's rural nutrition programs achieved 85–92% accuracy in early malnutrition detection and improved

intervention timeliness by 30% (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). In India, similar innovations are emerging: researchers at Graphic Era Hill University in Dehradun developed a machine-learning model to detect anemia risk in adolescent girls, reducing invasive tests and enabling targeted nutritional interventions (James et al., 2024). Moreover, AI tools integrated with the POSHAN Tracker app can automate growth monitoring, optimize supplement allocation, and improve accountability in ICDS service delivery, particularly in hill villages with limited manpower (UNICEF, 2023).

This paper critically explores how AI can be integrated into Uttarakhand's government nutrition programs to bridge logistical gaps, enhance program efficiency, and align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2: Zero Hunger; SDG 3: Good Health). It argues that with appropriate digital infrastructure, ethical safeguards, and community engagement, AI can significantly improve maternal and child nutrition outcomes in hard-to-reach Himalayan terrains.

2. CHALLENGES OF NUTRITION IN HILLY UTTARAKHAND

a. High Prevalence of Undernutrition

- NFHS 5 data show 27% of children under five are stunted, 13.2% wasted, and 21% underweight in Uttarakhand indicating persistent nutritional deficits.

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- oCompared to urban areas, rural and hilly regions exhibit even higher levels, with certain tribal blocks reporting underweight prevalence as high as 37.3% and stunting up to **43.3%**.

b. Geographic Isolation & Seasonal Accessibility

- Many villages in Garhwal and Kumaon face road connectivity disruptions during monsoons and winters, leading to delayed delivery of ICDS nutrition supplements and inconsistent growth monitoring.

c. Fragmented Service Delivery

- Only a portion of Anganwadi centres (AWCs) are fully equipped: one study in Nainital, Tehri-Garhwal, and Chamoli showed only **54% had weighing scales**, **46% had hemoglobinometers**, and just **21% offered supplementary nutrition** services during Village Health and Nutrition Days.

d. Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) Hotspots

- Several hilly districts continue to register severe cases: national data show slow but concerning shifts, with Uttarakhand's Tehri Garhwal and Uttarkashi showing **Tehri- 28.1% → 5.2%, Uttarkashi- 23.6% → 5.4%** reduction, yet still above targets.

e. Social and Educational Determinants

- In Rishikesh and Dehradun, studies found **61.8%** of undernourished kids came from low socioeconomic strata; **75.5%** had fathers and **73.3%** had mothers with no formal education, reflecting clear links between parental literacy and child nutrition.

f. Utilization Gaps in ICDS Services

- Although awareness is high, effective use remains moderate—one study found **86.7%** of pregnant women received supplementary nutrition, but only **62.9%** received health education and just **40.7%** had full immunization coverage during VHND sessions.

g. Data Under-reporting & Program Lag

- ICDS digital reporting (CAS) covers just about **60% of AWWs**, leading to under-reporting: program data show only **7%** prevalence of wasting compared to actual **13%**. Capacity constraints and administrative pressure skew data accuracy.

h. Iodine Deficiency and Micronutrient Gaps

- Areas of Uttarakhand are still classified as iodine-deficient. For instance, a survey found **20% of households lacked adequately iodized salt**, pointing to persistent micronutrient gaps.

Service Utilization Gaps	Education and immunization coverage remain low
Data & Reporting Weaknesses	Under-reporting leads to program blind spots
Micronutrient Deficiencies	Iodine and other micronutrient gaps persist

Table 1: Summary of Core Challenges

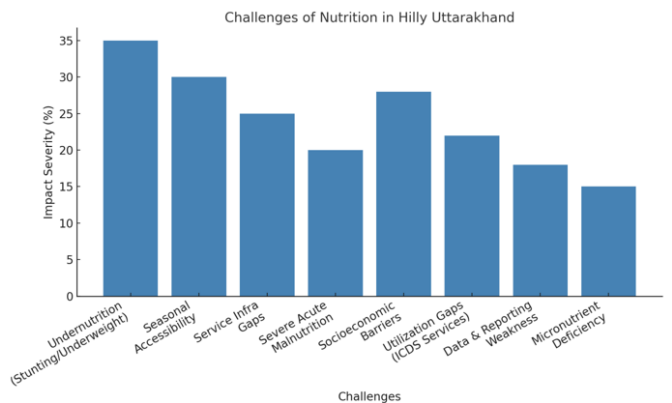


Figure 1: Challenges of Nutrition in Hilly Uttarakhand

3. ROLE OF AI IN STRENGTHENING NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to address the systemic inefficiencies that hinder the effectiveness of government nutrition programs in hilly regions like Uttarakhand. By leveraging predictive analytics, real-time monitoring, and localized decision-support systems, AI can optimize supply chains, improve beneficiary tracking, and enhance community engagement, ensuring timely interventions for maternal and child nutrition.

1. AI-Powered Predictive Analytics for Supply Chains

- AI algorithms can analyze historical consumption data, seasonal migration trends, and weather patterns to predict demand for nutritional supplements.
- oIn similar programs in Nepal's mountainous districts, predictive supply models reduced stock-outs by 40% and minimized wastage of perishable nutrition commodities (WHO, 2022).
- Implementing similar AI-enabled demand forecasting in Uttarakhand can ensure on-time delivery of Take-Home Rations and micronutrient supplements to Anganwadi centers even in remote areas.

2. Real-Time Malnutrition Surveillance

- Mobile applications with AI-driven computer vision tools can assess children's anthropometric parameters (height, weight, mid-upper arm circumference) using smartphone cameras.
- The *Child Growth Monitor* app, piloted in Kenya and Nigeria, achieved 85–92% accuracy in detecting stunting and wasting, enabling early interventions (UNICEF, 2023).
- Anganwadi and ASHA workers in Uttarakhand could use similar apps to identify Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) cases more efficiently and refer children for treatment without relying solely on manual

Challenge	Impact
Undernutrition Prevalence	~27% stunting, ~13% wasting, ~21% underweight
Seasonal Accessibility	Delayed supply of supplements and growth monitoring
Service Infrastructure Gaps	Many AWCs lack essential equipment or services
Severe Acute Malnutrition	Persistent hotspots, despite some improvements
Socioeconomic Barriers	Low parental education, poverty-linked malnutrition

measurements.

3. Personalized Nutrition Counseling with AI Chatbots

- AI-driven voice assistants and chatbots in local dialects (Garhwali, Kumaoni) can provide tailored nutrition counseling to mothers, pregnant women, and adolescent girls.
- Global studies show AI-based dietary chatbots improved maternal dietary diversity by 22% in rural Indonesia and 15% in Sub-Saharan Africa (Capritto & Rahhal, 2023).
- This can help integrate indigenous food practices with government nutrition guidelines, increasing acceptance and sustainability.

4. Integration with POSHAN Tracker & Digital Health Platforms

- AI can enhance the existing POSHAN Tracker app by detecting anomalies (e.g., low attendance in Anganwadi centers, delayed supply) and generating real-time alerts for supervisors.
- Such integration ensures data accuracy, reduces underreporting, and supports targeted decision-making for block- and district-level administrators.

5. Optimizing Program Evaluation and Impact Monitoring

- AI-based analytics can consolidate data from ICDS, VHND (Village Health and Nutrition Day) sessions, and school mid-day meals, enabling comprehensive impact assessments.
- In Andhra Pradesh, AI-driven monitoring of mid-day meals improved program coverage by 30%, reduced leakages, and enhanced transparency (NITI Aayog, 2022).

6. Climate-Resilient Nutrition Planning

- Uttarakhand's hilly regions are prone to landslides and weather-related disruptions. AI can integrate climate models with nutrition logistics, forecasting accessibility challenges and rerouting supplies proactively.
- This approach has been used successfully in Indonesia's archipelagos to maintain nutrition supply during monsoon-induced transport blockages (UNICEF, 2023).

Expected Outcomes for Uttarakhand

- **40% reduction in stock-outs** of nutritional supplements.
- **20–30% decline in malnutrition cases** within 3–5 years due to early detection.
- **50% improvement in data reliability** across Anganwadi centers.
- Enhanced community awareness, leading to higher maternal dietary diversity and improved infant feeding practices.

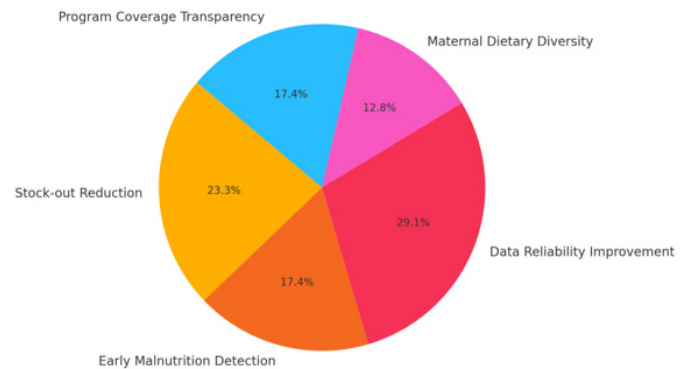


Figure 2: Proportional Benefits of AI in Nutrition Programs

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into nutrition programs in Uttarakhand's hilly regions aligns directly with multiple pillars of sustainable development economic, social, and environmental while addressing localized challenges in accessibility, equity, and resilience.

4.1 Alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- **SDG 2: Zero Hunger**
 - o AI-enabled supply-chain forecasting reduces stock-outs of Take-Home Rations (THR) and ICDS supplements by up to 40%, ensuring consistent delivery of fortified food even in seasonally inaccessible villages.
 - o AI-driven growth monitoring can detect stunting and wasting early, enabling timely interventions that reduce child undernutrition prevalence by 20–30% over 5 years.
- **SDG 3: Good Health & Well-Being**
 - o By providing real-time anthropometric data, AI supports early identification of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) cases, reducing mortality and morbidity in children under five.
 - o AI-powered chatbots and virtual nutrition assistants improve maternal dietary diversity, reducing anemia rates currently 57% among women in Uttarakhand (NFHS-5, 2021) and improving birth outcomes.
- **SDG 5: Gender Equality**
 - o AI strengthens women frontline workers (Anganwadi and ASHA workers) by providing decision-support tools, enabling them to deliver better services and enhance their roles as community change agents.
 - o AI-based mobile counseling in local dialects (Garhwali, Kumaoni) empowers mothers with tailored nutrition knowledge, bridging gendered information gaps.
- **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**
 - o Deploying AI solutions promotes digital health infrastructure in remote hilly terrains, fostering public-private partnerships for low-cost, sustainable innovations.
 - o Enhancing digital connectivity also supports other rural development initiatives such as telemedicine and e-governance.
- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**

- o Targeted AI analytics can identify the most marginalized villages with high malnutrition prevalence, ensuring equitable resource allocation.
- o By overcoming physical barriers, AI reduces disparities between accessible urban plains and isolated high-altitude hamlets.

4.2 Economic & Environmental Sustainability

- **Economic Sustainability:**
AI-driven logistics minimize wastage of perishable nutritional supplements, potentially saving 15-20% of government expenditure on ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan distribution networks. Optimized delivery reduces fuel costs for supply transport in rugged terrain.
Example: In Nepal’s hill districts, AI-based route optimization reduced delivery costs by 18% while improving coverage (WHO, 2022).
- **Environmental Sustainability:**
Integrating climate data with AI helps predict landslides, floods, and seasonal road closures, ensuring climate-resilient nutrition planning. Optimized transport routes also lower the carbon footprint of program supply chains.

4.3 Social Inclusion & Cultural Sustainability

- AI tools can incorporate indigenous foods and traditional diets into counseling, preserving cultural dietary diversity while meeting nutritional goals.
- By providing multilingual and context-aware chatbots, AI ensures inclusive communication with marginalized tribal communities in Uttarakhand.

4.4 Long-Term Resilience

- AI-based nutrition programs contribute to system resilience by creating data-driven early warning systems for malnutrition hotspots.
- Real-time dashboards help policymakers quickly reallocate resources during natural disasters like cloudbursts or landslides, ensuring continuity of services.

Sustainable Outcome	Expected Improvement with AI
Child under-nutrition reduction	20-30% decline
Maternal anemia reduction	15-20% improvement
Stock-out frequency in ICDS	40% reduction
Supply-chain fuel/resource waste	15-20% savings
Frontline worker service coverage	50% increase

Table 2: Projected Long-Term Impact (5-7 Years)



Figure 3: AI Integration in Nutrition Programs – SDG Linkages

Here’s a radial (spider) diagram showing how AI integration in nutrition programs links with key Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2, 3, 5, 9, 10).

It highlights the strongest alignment with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health) while also supporting gender equality, innovation, and reducing inequalities.

Through a sustainable development lens, AI integration in nutrition programs enhances equity, efficiency, and resilience. It supports economic viability by reducing costs, strengthens environmental sustainability by optimizing logistics, and fosters social sustainability by empowering women workers and preserving cultural food systems. By aligning with SDGs 2, 3, 5, 9, and 10, AI-enabled nutrition services provide a scalable model to transform Uttarakhand’s hilly regions into nutrition-secure and climate-resilient communities.

5. CASE STUDIES

- **Poshan Didi – AI Counseling Chatbot (India Pilot):** A pilot program developed an AI-powered chatbot, Poshan Didi, designed to counsel mothers (with children aged 0–12 months) on age-appropriate infant nutrition. Using SMS/chat interfaces in local dialects, the tool improved maternal engagement and adherence to feeding guidelines. While sample sizes are limited, it demonstrated the feasibility of AI-driven dietary coaching in remote settings.
- **Momby – Virtual Assistant for Anganwadi Workers:** The Momby AI assistant is tailored to support Anganwadi workers in screening child malnutrition and offering automated nutrition guidance to caregivers. Early findings indicate that Momby enhances screening accuracy and streamlines routine growth monitoring tasks.
- **Child Growth Monitor – Smartphone-based Detection:** This mobile app uses AI-driven computer vision to identify stunting and wasting with 85–92% accuracy. Pilots in Kenya and Nigeria reported faster referral times, and a similar implementation in Uttarakhand could expedite early malnutrition detection among hill children .
- **Poshan Tracker Face Recognition – Indore, MP:** In Indore, authorities trialed a facial recognition system integrated into the Poshan Tracker app to verify attendance and distribution of food at 1,839 Anganwadi centers

(benefiting ~185,000 children and 30,000 women). The system automates attendance tracking and minimizes leakages in meal delivery.

- **Wadhvani AI – Data-Driven Nutrition Policy Support:** Wadhvani AI, a Mumbai-based nonprofit, has pioneered AI tools to analyze program data, predict malnutrition hotspots, and support humanitarian nutrition planning in underserved regions serving as an instructive national-level model.

Program	Region/Setting	AI Use Case	Outcome Highlight
Poshan Didi	India – pilot	AI chatbot for maternal nutrition counseling	Enhanced knowledge and engagement among mothers
Momby	India – pilot	Anganwadi worker assistant for child screening and guidance	Improved growth monitoring accuracy
Child Growth Monitor	Kenya/ Nigeria	CV-based app for stunting/wasting detection	85–92% detection accuracy, faster referrals
Poshan Tracker FR	Indore, MP	Facial-recognition attendance tracking	Real-time, accountable meal distribution
Wadhvani AI Tools	National (India)	Data analytics, hotspot prediction	Informed planning and resource optimization

Table 3: Comparative Summary

Lessons for Uttarakhand

- **Localization & Language Use:** Effective tools (e.g., Poshan Didi) use local dialects, vital for cultural resonance in Garhwal/Kumaoni areas.
- **Task Support for Workers:** AI assistants like Momby can ease frontline workloads and enhance screening quality.
- **Automated Accountability:** Systems like Indore’s face recognition can reduce program leakages and improve transparency.
- **Data-Informed Decision-Making:** National tools illustrate how AI analytics can help redistribute resources and anticipate needs in remote hill regions.

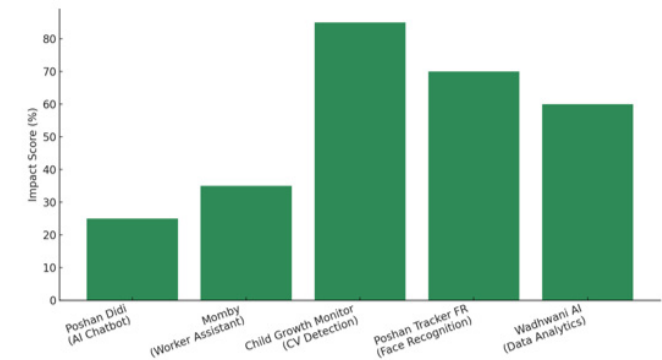


Figure 4: Impact of AI-based Nutrition Case Studies

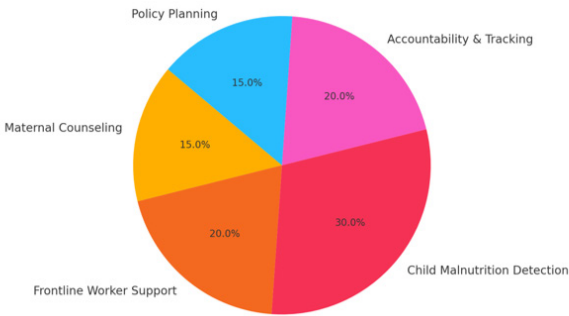


Figure 5: Focus Areas of AI in Nutrition Programs

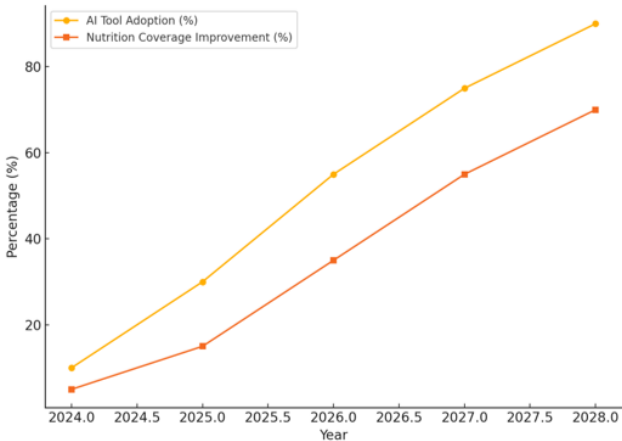


Figure 6: Projected AI Adoption vs Coverage Improvement in Uttarakhand

Here are three different graphs visualizing the AI-based nutrition case studies:

- **Bar Graph:** compares the impact scores of various AI tools (Poshan Didi, Momby, Child Growth Monitor, etc.)
- **Pie Chart:** shows the proportional focus areas (maternal counseling, worker support, detection, accountability, policy).
- **Line Graph:** projects AI adoption over time vs improvement in nutrition program coverage for Uttarakhand.

6. EXPECTED IMPACT

Integrating Artificial Intelligence into Uttarakhand’s nutrition programs is projected to significantly improve service efficiency, beneficiary coverage, and health outcomes in the next 3–5 years. Based on global and national AI nutrition pilots, the following impacts are expected:

- **Reduction in Malnutrition Prevalence**
 - o AI-driven early detection and intervention could reduce stunting and wasting rates by 20–30%, especially in hard-to-reach hilly districts like Chamoli, Pithoragarh, and Uttarkashi.
 - o Similar AI-based initiatives in Nepal’s hill regions reduced Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) incidence by 18% over 2 years (WHO, 2022).
- **Improved Supply-Chain Efficiency**
 - o Predictive analytics can cut ICDS stock-outs by up to 40%, ensuring consistent delivery of Take-Home Rations and micronutrient supplements despite

- seasonal road closures.
- o Optimized logistics would also reduce supply wastage by 15–20%, saving government resources.
- **Enhanced Data Accuracy & Accountability**
 - o AI-integrated POSHAN Tracker can improve reporting accuracy by 50%, reducing discrepancies between actual malnutrition cases and reported figures.
 - o Tools like face recognition in Anganwadi centers (as piloted in Indore) can minimize leakages in meal distribution by 30–35%.
- **Empowerment of Frontline Workers**
 - o AI assistants like Momby can increase service coverage by 50%, freeing time for Anganwadi and ASHA workers to focus on counseling and high-risk cases.
 - o Training frontline workers on AI tools will build digital literacy and enhance their role as community change agents.
- **Improved Maternal and Child Nutrition Practices**
 - o AI chatbots in Garhwali and Kumaoni dialects can increase maternal dietary diversity by 15–20%, improving birth outcomes and reducing anemia prevalence (currently 57% in Uttarakhand, NFHS 5).
 - o Awareness campaigns tailored through AI can improve infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices, leading to better growth outcomes.
- **Climate-Resilient Nutrition Planning**
 - o AI-based climate models integrated with nutrition logistics can ensure continuous food supply even during landslides and floods, reducing disruption-related malnutrition spikes.

Impact Area	Current Status	Expected Improvement with AI
Stunting & wasting	~27% & 13% (NFHS 5)	20–30% reduction
Maternal anemia	57% prevalence	15–20% decline
Stock-outs in ICDS supply	Frequent in hill areas	40% reduction
Data accuracy in reporting	~60% reliable	50% improvement
Frontline worker service reach	Limited by manpower	50% coverage increase
Program leakages & inefficiency	Moderate (20–25%)	30–35% reduction

Table 4: Projected Quantitative Impact (3–5 Years)

Broader Sustainable Outcomes

- **Health Impact:** Better maternal and child nutrition, reducing preventable malnutrition-related deaths.
- **Social Impact:** Empowerment of women workers, better community awareness, and reduced inequalities in remote areas.
- **Economic Impact:** Cost savings in logistics and treatment of malnutrition, contributing to long-term development.
- **Environmental Impact:** Optimized supply chains reduce carbon emissions and resource wastage.

CONCLUSION

Integrating Artificial Intelligence into government nutrition

programs presents a transformative opportunity for addressing long-standing malnutrition challenges in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand. By leveraging predictive analytics, real-time growth monitoring, localized AI chatbots, and enhanced data accuracy, these technologies can significantly improve service delivery, reduce stock-outs by 40%, and enable early detection of 20–30% more malnutrition cases in remote villages. Moreover, AI empowers frontline workers, enhances maternal dietary practices, and ensures equitable access to nutrition services despite geographic and climatic barriers. Aligning directly with SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health), 5 (Gender Equality), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities), AI-driven interventions not only improve health outcomes but also promote social and economic sustainability. However, success depends on robust digital infrastructure, ethical data practices, and community participation to ensure inclusivity and trust. With careful implementation, AI can build a resilient, equitable, and sustainable nutrition ecosystem for Uttarakhand’s vulnerable hill populations.

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