

NUTRITION IN NEPAL



A MONTHLY
MEDIA MONITORING
REPORT, Push 2073



Cover Photo: Hoijali Bhudhali of Bajura with her 13 months old daughter Antila at District Health Post. Rajdhani Daily. Retrieved from <http://rajdhanidaily.com/2016/12/26/27190/>

Study Team

Dr Sushil Baral

Rajesh Ghimire

Sudeep Uprety

Kritagya Regmi

Bipul Lamichhane

This report is produced by Health Research and Social Development Forum (HERD) as part of monthly media monitoring study conducted by Research Uptake and Communications Unit at HERD. The media monitoring exercise will be conducted for a year from Mangshir 2073 BS to Push 2074 BS as part of the 'Support to Implementation of MSNP' project.

Executive Summary

According to WHO, nutrition is the right intake of food, in relation to the body's dietary needs. A good nutritional state is a prerequisite for avoiding diseases and remaining healthy. Both under nutrition and obesity has been a serious problem in Nepal. Nepal is currently facing health problems associated with the consumption of either too little nutrient rich food or too much energy-dense food. Proper nutrition in childhood and adolescence promotes healthy growth and development. A nutritious diet over the life course can help prevent high many diseases in the long run. Poor nutrition can lead to reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to diseases, impaired physical and mental development and reduced productivity. The staggering problem of malnutrition is widespread enough in Nepal to severely affect its sustainable development ambitions.

Tackling malnutrition effectively is also key in meeting many other SDG targets. Good nutrition signals the realisation of people's rights to food and health. When people's nutritional status improves, it helps to break the cycle of poverty, generates higher GDP and leads to a host of benefits for individuals, families, communities, and countries. Good nutrition provides both a foundation for development and the framework needed to ensure people reach their full potential.

This media monitoring was conducted through a systematic investigation of 16 print and online media sources, to identify the current scenario of nutrition in Nepal and the efforts made to improve its situation. We attempted to recognise the current trends and issues on nutrition in Nepal as portrayed by the media sources. This media monitoring attempts to capture a valid picture of nutrition in Nepal with respect to the current nutritional

situation, nutritional vulnerabilities, efforts and progress made in the country.

Accountability of multiple stakeholders (government, non-government and private sector) is the key for joint ownership and efforts to improve nutritional status in Nepal.

Introduction

Malnutrition is known to have an effect upon new born, children, adolescents and pregnant/ breastfeeding mothers. Healthy diets can help the children grow, develop and perform well in school and ultimately help in the economic development of the country. Essential nutrients include protein, carbohydrate, fats, vitamins, minerals and electrolytes. A poor diet may cause health problems, causing deficiency diseases such as blindness, anemia, scurvy, preterm birth and still birth. It can cause common chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and osteoporosis.

Nepal falls under one of the poorest countries in the world and about 55% of the population are known to be living under the poverty line and it ranked 145th out of 187 countries on UNDP's 2014 Human Development Index. According to USAID, in Nepal over 40% of children under the age of five are known to be suffering from stunting, 11% from wasting and 29% from underweight. Furthermore, among the disadvantaged groups, the rate of stunting is as high as 60%. Stagnant growth and political instability have contributed to severe food shortages and high rate of under nutrition, mostly affecting vulnerable women and children in the remote parts of the country. Furthermore, the norms and traditional beliefs along with lack of awareness and

geographic/economic factors the women and children have poor nutritional situation. Although a great deal of progress is being made in reducing malnutrition, it is still too slow and too unevenly distributed in Nepal.

This media monitoring sought to track down stories on nutrition in Nepal as reported by the media in an attempt to identify the present picture and the progress made regarding nutrition in Nepal. We sought to have a quick glimpse on the context of nutrition in Nepal and to track the nutritional campaigns, discover the malnutrition trends, nature and extent of malnutrition, and obtain insight on how media and other agencies are responding to the problems of malnutrition in Nepal. We also aimed to understand how aid donors, NGOs, private sector and other relevant stakeholders are engaged in nutrition in Nepal.

Methodology

This media monitoring study was carried out for a period of one month from December 16 to January 15 (covering stories of Push 2073 BS). We collected various media stories by conducting daily media monitoring of national mainstream and online sources viz. The Himalayan Times, Republica, The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Nagarik, Rajdhani, Annapurna Post, The Rising Nepal, Gorkhapatra, Nepali Times, Himal Khabar, Online Khabar, Setopati, Pahilopost and Nepal Khabar. Furthermore, random search was also carried out in the internet with the keyword 'nutrition'.

We gathered a total of 36 media stories concerning nutrition and food security. The stories were recorded in Microsoft Excel detailing the date, title, sources and links to the article. These articles were then synthesised and categorised into various themes and sub-themes.

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Major Findings

The major findings of the media stories have been broadly categorised into the following sections; **Current Scenario, Issues and Efforts Made.**

Current Scenario

Based on the media stories we have collected, the situation of nutrition is poor in Nepal. According to the District Health Office in Bajura, 785 children in the district were found to be malnourished. Based on the height and weight survey conducted in Bajura which studied 4368 children, 785 were found to be malnourished. 14% of residents of Bajura are known to die before they reach the age of 40, which demonstrates the intensity of the problem in the district. In Bajura a 10 year old child's (Rajbhadur Dhami) is reported to be in severe condition due to being infected with TB while having severe malnutrition. Treatment for such a condition was not available in the village health post and he was referred to another health facility. Due to economic and financial reasons he was not provided proper treatment and had eventually died according to another news report in Rajdhani National Daily. Furthermore in Bajura, drought has caused a serious problem among the residents according to the district Agriculture Development Office. They lack sufficient food and are not sure about what they will be eating for the year. The farmers particularly from 5, 6 and 7 number VDC are particularly in trouble with very little food produced to support them throughout the year. For the past three years there has



Source: *Rajdhani Daily*, Hoijali Bhudhali of Bajura with her 13 months old daughter Antila at District Health Post. Retrieved from <http://rajdhanidaily.com/2016/12/26/27190/>



Source: *Rajdhani National Daily*, 10 years old Raj Bahadur Dhami who had died of severe malnutrition. Retrieved from: <http://rajdhanidaily.com/2016/12/27/27480/>

been no rain fall or snow in Bajura and the farmers have not been able to sow their crops resulting in severe food deficiency.

Another news story in the Himalayan Times claims that child mortality in Nepal had decreased due to availability of health care and immunization services however the chances of malnutrition among children below the age of 5 have been higher compared to the previous years. The Himalayan times and Republica covers another story of a 17 year old child (Shambhu Kumar Ram) from Dadha VDC-7 of Saptari who had died of severe malnutrition



Source: *The Himalayan Times, Death of a Boy.*

Retrieved from:

<http://www.myrepublica.com/news/11876>

and lack of treatment. The problem malnutrition. These villages lack proper facilities and fails to provide timely and proper treatment to the children resulting in deaths of more and more children. These people live below poverty and lack proper awareness.

In Dadeldhura, about 13% children were found to be affected with malnutrition. When the health conditions of the district's 6167 were examined, more than 800 children were found to be affected with malnutrition according to the District Health Office. Moreover, over a dozen organizations have been involved for improving nutritional situation in the district, but they have failed to produce significant results in Dadeldhura.



Source: *Online Khabar, People Living under poverty.* Retrieved from:

<http://www.onlinekhabar.com/2017/01/525042/>

A news report in Annapurna Post, mentions several cases of severe malnutrition in different districts of Nepal. Among them is a story involving a boy named Pawan Nepali from Mugu who had recently died of severe malnutrition. He had been suffering from severe under

nutrition for more than a year and did not have any access to health facilities. Another story involved a young child of 14 months named Sushil Yogi from Kalikot who had died of lack of nutritious food and lack of proper and timely treatment. The news report also includes another story of a young girl of 1 year 7 months from Kalikot who weighs only 4 kg and 100 grams and a story of a parent named Shukla Subedi who's both children are severely malnourished.



Source: *The Himalayan Times*, 5 Years old Pawan Nepali who died of malnutrition. Retrieved from: <http://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/malnutrition-rampant-among-karnali-kids/>

According to the annual survey conducted by the District Health Office in Mugu, among children between the age of 3 months and 5 years, 61% were found to be malnourished. The children particularly from Jima, Rowa, Vee, Fotu, Narthapu, Karkibada, Magri, Seri, Gamtha and Hyanglu VCD are severely affected by malnutrition. Statistics tell that in Mugu, 11% of the children are known to be suffering from severe malnutrition, 27% from moderate malnutrition and 61% from mild malnutrition. 17 children has been known to have died in the district and a total of 436 children had been admitted to health facilities and 270 among them have been successfully treated and 21 children have been referred to other health facilities for treatment.



Source: *Nagarik News*, Vulnerable Children and Women in Saptari. Retrieved from: <http://www.nagariknews.com/news/11582>

According to a news report in The Himalayan Times, various surveys carried out in the VDCs of Karnali show that most children suffer from varying degrees of malnutrition. Kalikot district reportedly has the most number of malnourished

children. In Mugu, 1,015 of 2,609 children were found to be malnourished. According to a screening test carried out for malnutrition in six VDCs by the District Health Office Jumla, 49 percent children were malnourished.

In Gulmi, the production of rice has gone down this year according to a news in Online Khabar. The Agriculture development office in Gulmi claims that the production of rice has gone down to 24355 metric ton as compared to 90432 metric ton on the previous year. The main reason for this is because most of the manpower has gone abroad and most of the fertile lands are vacant and are not used for growing rice.

Another story in The Himalayan Times shows that, 1 out of 20 children die from malnutrition every year before they reach one year and 1 out of 16 die before they are five years old. Surveys also show that 71% of the boys and 59% of the girls are malnourished. However, the figure of malnutrition remains the same in both urban and rural areas. Malnutrition is higher in Terai than in the hilly and mountain regions. Meanwhile, adolescents, as such, are more prone to anemia when they are malnourished with 35% of them being afflicted with this disease.

A writer claims that people's preference to consuming only rice is one of the major reasons for malnutrition in the Karnali region

Issues

According to Dr. Aruna Uprety, in Karnali, people's preference to consuming only rice is one of the major reasons for malnutrition in the region. Despite the availability of other food like maize, potato, barley, etc. along with other vegetables, people in the region still are facing the problems of food scarcity and severe under-nutrition, she claimed. If people eat what is available and at their disposal, the problem of malnutrition will eventually subside by itself in the long run in the region. Creating awareness among people can help to reduce malnutrition in Karnali.

Another news report in Online Khabar, states that in Jhapa, lack of nutritious food is not the main reason behind malnutrition but lack of awareness regarding the importance of feeding nutritious food is the main reason. Distribution of balanced food would help to address the problem of malnutrition in Jhapa, according to the news.

In Solukhumbu, a packet of salt costs 190 Rupees and a kilo of rice costs between 240 Rupees and 290 Rupees. This has put severe burden especially upon the poor and vulnerable people. They are currently paying about 10 times more than what is paid for it in Kathmandu according to a news in Pahilopost.

Furthermore, a news article in Pahilopost states that the rice given by the Japanese government as grant to Nepal has been stored vainly for the past 4 years at Nepal Khadya Sansthan's (Nepal Food Corporation) storehouse in Nepalgunj. The 10600 sacks of rice (each containing 30 kilograms each) has been kept in the storehouse and the central level is still indecisive on what to do with the rice.

Efforts Made

In Kalikot youths have organized free health camp for the malnourished people along with people suffering from a host of other diseases in Raku VDC. This initiative "Better Nepal" has been distributing food, clothes and medicines among the neediest populations in Raku. A total of 250 people were examined by them according to a news report in the Himalayan times, Setopati and Online Khabar.

The Child Health Division under the Ministry of Health, has planned to provide outpatient services in local health posts in Karnali. The division has planned to start the

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service in 50 health posts for the treatment of severe malnutrition cases. Additionally, the division will be providing food and medicines along with compensation of the transportation cost for bringing the child to the district. The department has also decided to provide a fund of 100,000 rupees to all district hospitals in 75 districts for the treatment of malnutrition.

Moreover, the government has decided to provide social security allowance for children living under poverty in Rautahat, Bajhang and Accham. A sum of 600 rupees per month will be provided to children from poor families. The allowance is set to be provided in these three districts first and will gradually be expanded to other districts as well. Prior to this, allowances were provide to dalits and children below five years of age in Karnali. In Accham, all children below the age of 5 will be given 400 rupees per child per month from Magh. A budget of over 1 crore 54 lakhs has been allocated for this purpose in the district according to Gorkhapatra.

According to a report in The Himalayan Times, with the tragic demise of 17 years old Shambhu Kumar Ram, the government has launched an additional nutrition programme in Saptari where the problem of malnutrition is extreme with about 24000 children known to be malnourished. As per the programme, the DDC and the seven district government offices will spend 10 million rupees in the district and a sum of 1.7 million rupees has been provided to each of the six government offices in Saptari. Additionally, the MSNP operation is set to be expanded to 34 VDCs from the pre-existing 6 VDCs.

According to the Minister for Agricultural Development, Gauri Sankar Chaudhary, an agriculture research and development center is to be established in each of the 7 provinces of Nepal for improving the quality and

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quantity of agricultural products in Nepal. He further claimed that laws need to be made to retain the skilled manpower in Nepal for agricultural development as per a report in Online Khabar. Also, realising the severity of malnutrition and food security in Nepal the National Planning Commission had brought forth the Nutrition Campaign in 2012 coordinating with various government ministries. The plan envisaged a 20% reduction in malnutrition among children aged below five years of age and pregnant women and has been working to achieve its targets.

Practice of traditional healers such as *Dhami/Jhakri* could also be contributing factor for degrading health seeking behaviour.

Discussion

Findings from our media monitoring study suggest that the nutritional status in many parts of Nepal needs much improvement. The situation of malnutrition is extreme in Bajura, Saptari, Kailali, Dadeldhura, Mugu and Karnali according to the media reports. Lack of access and lack of adequate health facilities is prevalent among the vulnerable parts of the country. Furthermore, the production of agricultural products has not been up to the mark causing severe food insecurity in Nepal. Practice of traditional healers such as *Dhami/Jhakri* could also be contributing factor for degrading health seeking behaviour. Lack of awareness, socio-economic background and cultural factors can be held responsible for the high prevalence of malnutrition in Nepal. Furthermore, thousands of women in Nepal face severe complications during the time of delivery threatening the life and long term well-being of the child.

The nutritional status of mothers and children under five years of age is extremely poor. Over the past 20 years, little improvement has been observed in the nutritional status of children in Nepal. Improvements in agricultural productivity have not maintained pace with the population growth. Malnutrition, poses a great risk to

Nepal's progress and is a barrier to achieving the full potential of the people. Low growth and political instability have contributed to food shortages and deteriorating condition of nutrition in Nepal. Food consumption is just one of the multiple factors which have an impact on the nutritional status of the overall population. Other important influences include level of awareness, disease, poor coverage of health infrastructures and socio-economic factors.

Conclusion and Major Recommendations

As malnutrition is a serious health problem we should take concerted actions so that no one is deprived of nutritious food essentials for health and survival. Malnutrition remains an impediment to child survival, growth and development in Nepal. The benefits of developing healthy dietary and lifestyle patterns from an early age can positively affect the health of the individuals and the economic ambitions of Nepal.

Improved agriculture leading to better household food security has been identified as a fundamental determinant of food security, adequate dietary intake and nutritional status, and health. There is a pressing need to improve early childhood practices/breastfeeding, improve sanitation, improve health facilities and service coverage, and increase agricultural investments.

There is a need for immediate corrective measures to provide nutritious food particularly for those who need them and suffer the most. It is advised to eat nutritious food like green vegetables and fruits. These should be made easily available so that all can access such food. Moreover, it is essential to provide information to all about the necessity of taking nutritious food especially

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among the vulnerable populations in Nepal. Provision of providing nutritional education can prove to be vital in improving nutritional status of the rural community.

In order to reduce the malnutrition throughout the country it is necessary to introduce a broader package of nutrition intervention. Community based programmes addressing malnutrition needs to be made effective and accessible. Counselling about breastfeeding and food fortification has the greatest potential to reduce the burden of child morbidity and mortality in Nepal. Moreover, improvement of complementary feeding could substantially reduce stunting and related burden of diseases.

There is a need for effective implementation of food fortification and supplementation programmes. Promotion of demand driven interventions incorporating needs of the local communities will also enhance the possibility of reaching out to the unreached communities. Timely revision of policies and legal provisions also helps in providing the strategic guidance for design and implementation of the nutrition programmes. ■

HERD is a dynamic national non-governmental organisation, promoting evidence informed policies and practices for sustainable development in health, environment and social sectors to improve quality of life.



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