

# NUTRITION IN NEPAL



A MONTHLY  
MEDIA MONITORING  
REPORT, Fagun 2073

Cover Photo: A child being provided polio vaccine.

Source:

<http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-03-06/18-officials-booked-for-disrupting-polio-drive.html>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Malnutrition is a serious health problem in Nepal. According to [Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011](#), 41% of Nepali children are suffering from chronic malnutrition. As a result, there is high prevalence of death of children due to malnutrition especially in remote areas of Nepal.

Nutritious diet is vital for development of children and can help to prevent many diseases in the long run. Meanwhile, the impact of malnutrition is as such that it reduces immunity and impairs their mental and physical development. Consumption of poor nutritional diets has affected proper growth and development of children, caused many related illness and has resulted in many casualties among children particularly in rural areas of Nepal. In a macro perspective, malnutrition has affected the national economic growth in Nepal due to loss of productive labour resulting in lower GDP.

Both under nutrition and over nutrition is a serious problem in Nepal arising with vulnerable groups either consuming more or less than what is required. Malnutrition in Nepal can be ascribed to poor feeding and care, insufficient nutrient intake, high rate of infections and complications during pregnancy. **People from rural areas of Nepal are affected by a triple threat: food insecurity, low access to health services and poor financial ability.** Furthermore, low level of literacy and awareness in Nepal is also adding to the severity of the problem.

This study was conducted through a systematic investigation and analysis of 16 print and online media sources; to identify the current scenario of nutrition in Nepal and the current activities along with efforts that have been made to control and reduce the level of prevalence of malnutrition by several government and non-government agencies. We sought to recognize the

current trends and issues associated with nutrition as illustrated by the media sources. We attempted to capture a valid picture on nutritional situation in the country particularly focusing on the current situation, vulnerabilities, efforts and progress made with regards to nutrition in Nepal.

It is evident that prompt and immediate actions are required by both the government and the non-government sector to deal with the problem of nutrition in Nepal. Better policies to ensure food security and quality of diet is crucial in reducing if not eliminating the extent of problem that persists in modern day Nepal. More direct and concentrated effort is required to see off the problem anytime soon.

## INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition is a serious condition that occurs when a person's diet does not contain the right amount of nutrients as needed by the body. A malnourished individual lacks strength to undertake routine activities and has reduced concentration levels among children. Good nutrition is prerequisite for the national development and for the well-being of individuals. Although problems related to poor nutrition affects the entire population, women and children are particularly vulnerable because of their unique physiology and socio-economic characteristics. Nutrition plays a critical role in child's growth and development and the period from birth to age two is important for optimal growth and development. However, in Nepal, children falling under this age group are found with severe micronutrient deficiencies resulting in childhood illness such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections.

Malnutrition and diseases seem to work in a deadly cycle. A malnourished child is more likely to suffer from diseases, and

the more they suffer from disease the more likely they are to be malnourished. Likewise, a woman's nutritional status is also important as this determines not only her health but also the health of her children. Malnourished women are economically unproductive and are more likely to get infected and recover slowly from illness and have increased chances of complications during pregnancy. Their children are also likely to give birth to children with low birth rate, and this cycle continues. It is quite obvious that the problem of malnutrition is still being overlooked and it requires immediate attention by all relevant stakeholders at all levels.

This media monitoring involved tracking down of relevant media stories with respect to nutrition and food security in order to identify the current state of malnutrition and the attempts that are being made to improve the situation. We aimed to take a closer look on the context of nutrition in Nepal and to track down nutritional campaigns, identify trends, discover the prevalence level, to understand how agencies aid and donors are engaged in it, and to understand how media and other agencies are responding to it. This study also attempts to draw attention of concerned authorities and researchers, to explore further and acquire more information regarding the nature and extent of problem which can be helpful in revising the current approaches and in achieving the goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition from Nepal.

## METHODOLOGY

This media monitoring study was carried out for the period of **one month from February 12 to March 13 (Falgun 2073 BS)**. We collected various stories by conducting daily media monitoring of national mainstream and online sources

viz.: The Himalayan Times, Republica, The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Rajdhani, Annapurna Post, The Rising Nepal, Gorkhapatra, Nepali Times, Himal Khabar, Online Khabar, Setopati, Pahilopost and Nepal Khabar. In addition to that, random search was also carried out in the internet with the keyword 'nutrition'.

During this period, we managed to gather a total of **24 media stories related to nutrition**. The collected stories were recorded in Microsoft Excel detailing the date, title, sources and links to the story. The stories were then synthesised and categorised into various themes and sub-themes. Therefore, three-step process was followed: information finding, information recording, and analysis. The major findings from our media monitoring study are as follows;

## MAJOR FINDINGS

The major finding from the stories in media have been broadly categorized into the following categories; **Current Scenario, Issues and Efforts Made**.

### CURRENT SCENARIO

According to the stories presented in the news sources the situation of malnutrition in Nepal seems critical. A story in [Naya Patrika](#) reports that a 2.5 months old infant from **Lamjung** has been suffering from malnutrition due to financial crisis in her family. She is the first daughter of 16 years old Anju and Govinda Budaprithi. Her mother neglected taking proper food during her pregnancy and despite of her awareness on importance of nutritious diet during pregnancy, she was deprived from it due to her financial inability.



Source: [Naya Patrika, February 14](#)

Similarly, according to a story in [Annapurna Post](#), **Dadeldhura**'s Sarathi Budhair, was deprived of nutritious diet during her pregnancy as she was unable to afford the diets recommended by the doctors. Her twin daughters are both malnourished now. Similarly a 20-month old Ayush Roka of **Kalikot** is also malnourished. Her mother gave birth at a very young age and did not have much knowledge about food intake or pregnancy during the time.

The level of ignorance on nutrition and healthy food among Nepalis is unbelievable according to an article in [My Republica](#). It suggests that lack of awareness is the main reason behind Nepal's malnutrition problem. The article suggests that most kids are fine until they are breastfeeding and start developing deficiencies as they start going to school, this is particularly true in urban areas where little children have to walk for hours to reach school and don't eat anything during their day. Even when they return home, in most cases, their parents tend to be so busy and they don't have time to cook meals in the afternoon, and children have to wait till dinner for a decent meal. Another important issue is the type of food Nepali people tend to consume. People do not follow a balanced approach to their diets in Nepal and emphasise on eating large amount of rice, dhedo or potatoes. As long as their belly is full, they don't

seem to care much about the vital nutrients they are missing out on.

A news report on [The Himalayan Times](#) mentions that a recent report released by DPHO in Bajura has revealed that malnourished girls outnumber the boys by a huge margin in the district. In the district 727 girls out of 135 children were reported to be suffering from malnutrition. DPHO has also claimed that many mothers tend to actively participate in breastfeeding only if their child was a boy. Another story involves a six year old girl named [Om Maya Mijar](#) of **Dhading** who has been battling malnutrition from birth. She is the third daughter of 26 years old Juthi Mijar who is both underweight and much shorter than normal for her age and has problems with sitting and waling properly. Juthi has 5 children and is currently pregnant and all her children are reported to be malnourished. Juthi says that they have very little food and can barely manage one meal per day. In Dhading, more than 100 children are malnourished particularly from the Dalit and the chepang community. Although the government and various non-government organizations have reportedly launched nutrition programmes here, no results have been reported. More than 700 children are known to be malnourished in the district.

Another story in [The Himalayan Times](#) involves a 14-month-old boy has succumbed to malnutrition in Pajaru of **Jajarkot** district on Wednesday. Anegat Nepali who was first son to Hira Nepali and Karna Bahadur Nepali. The child weighed only five kg and was receiving treatment. However, he breathed his last while being taken to the district headquarters for further treatment last night. It has been learned that the child's parents were busy taking him to shamans for treatment rather than going to a medical facility earlier.

In [Hetauda](#), over 8% children have been found to be malnourished, and most of them are victims of the April earthquake and belong from areas where food scarcity prevail. It has been found that people living in temporary sheds are prone to be malnourished. In the district about 500 children have been found to be severely malnourished and 2400 children to be suffering from mild malnutrition.

## ISSUES

The major issues reported through media stories on nutrition for this month is the **obstruction of immunisation programmes in several districts from Terai regions**. A report in [My Republica](#) has covered the story of polio vaccine administration programme has been obstructed due to protest of health workers in various districts. A programme which had not been interfered during the 10 years of insurgency, has been barricaded by the health workers themselves. **In Kailali, the immunisation programme has been obstructed due to protests of the health workers. The protest had delayed the arrival of necessary vaccine affecting 116, 846 children below five years of age in the district** and the case is similar for 15 other districts.

In Nepal, malnutrition is caused by a series of underlying factors ranging from cultural beliefs and superstitions, widespread poverty, poor health facilities, sanitation, early childcare practices and agricultural investments.. Political instability and frequently changing government has affected the nutrition programmes and nutrition specific policies.

## EFFORTS MADE

It has to be acknowledged that several efforts have been made to improve the nutritional status in Nepal by both public and private agencies and noticeable progress has been made in this regard. A news story in [The Himalayan Times](#), a nutrition programme to eradicate malnutrition in children from Ramechhap district has become successful, with almost all children successfully treated. The programme was launched with the help of UNICEF after the 2014 earthquake to identify and treat malnourished children. According to [District Health Office](#), Dhading, in a survey among 28,682 children, most were found to be malnourished in varying degrees. The DHO said that shelters have been established to treat severe malnutrition in 11 places, and mild malnutrition in 32 places in the district.



Source: [The Himalayan Times](#)

A story in [Naya Patrika](#) mentions that upon hearing the story of Anju and Govinda Budaprithi's 2.5 month old daughter from Lamjung, an employee from Naya Patrika, Deepak Adhikari had provided 10,000 Rupees as help to the couple. The money was provides to buy and feed proper food to the infant daughter. Such small contributions could prove to be invaluable to the couple and their daughter.



Source: [Naya Patrika, February 13](#)

Some positive stories have also been reported. According to a news story in [Gorkhapatra](#), the cases of malnutrition has been declining in Kavrepalanchowk district. The number of children suffering from malnutrition has gone down to 500 from 3535 within the past two years according to the DHO in Kavre. The cases were extremely high during the time of the earthquake as much children were deprived of proper food. However, the situation has improved a lot in the district.

Furthermore, according to news stories reported in [The Kathmandu Post](#), [Nagarik](#), [Annapurna Post](#), [Gorkhapatra](#) and [Naya Patrika](#), the Ministry of Health has decided to book 18 government officials, including chiefs of three district health offices for obstructing the polio vaccination campaign. They have



Source: [Annapurna Post, March 5](#)

been asked to provide a written clarification within three days why departmental action should not be taken against them which could affect their career prospects.

According to [My Republica](#) the Ministry of Health is also planning to relocate the some health staffers after their protests reportedly affected the polio immunisation program in 15 districts. A day after the two-day polio vaccination programme obstruction, the government on Monday launched door-to-door polio administration drive in 15 districts of the country to ensure that children are not deprived of regular immunisation according to [The Kathmandu Post](#).



Source: [My Republica, March 5](#)

In addition to it, [WHO](#) office for South-East Asia has called for a healthier future for newborns and mothers in several countries including Nepal. They have concentrated their attention and have designed strategies to help support nations in overcoming the problem of malnutrition. In the South-East Asia Region, each year birth defects are responsible for an estimated 90,000 newborn deaths, said the UN health agency. WHO office in SEA has called for a healthier future for newborns and mothers in several countries including Nepal. They have concentrated their attention and

## DISCUSSIONS

This report suggests that the threat malnutrition bears on infants and mothers in Nepal is colossal. Even today we find news of children dying from malnutrition and related diseases. Infants and children have continued to die over the past few decade just because of inadequate diet. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world with many people living under the poverty line. Many mothers have been deprived of nutritious food during pregnancy and new born infants are not fed adequately during their first years of life. Even in cases where the mother is well aware about the importance of nutritious food for her and her baby's wellbeing, there are cases where proper food is inaccessible to them either due to geographical contains or financial inability.

Furthermore, girls marrying at early and giving birth at an early age is another underlying factor behind malnutrition and child mortality in Nepal. Women from rural part of Nepal are widely engaged in the practice of child marriage. They are likely to have up to 4 children before they reach age of 20. Without any sort of financial soundness and income source, they keep giving birth to more and more children. This has resulted in the children being malnourished and leaving them vulnerable to many illness. Such parents usually are illiterate and unaware of the importance of nutrition for their and their children's wellbeing and belong to the rural parts of the country.

Even among the children who are breastfed well are likely to suffer from malnutrition as they start going to school. Schools in Nepal do not provide food and are located far away from the rural villages. Children walk for hours each day to reach school and spend a lot of energy in doing so but their food intake is not proportional to the calories they

waste during the day. Even when they eat, they may not eat healthy. Nepali people seem to have irregular diet patterns with tendency to eat large amount of rice and ignore other nutrients that they are missing out from their diet.

Health seeking behaviour and availability of quality and accessible services at health facilities is also prevalent in Nepal. Although the treatment and facilities for treating malnutrition has become more efficient in Nepal, most patients, especially from rural areas, have little or no access to formal health services and do not visit the health facilities.

There is existing belief on shamans and traditional healers. Lack of education and knowledge particularly in the most rural areas have contributed towards people believing that illness is a consequence of making the Gods and Goddesses angry. They prefer sacrificing animals as a remedy for malnutrition than seek professional medical help.

Several protests and strikes in many districts of Nepal obstructed the administration of polio vaccines. The protest delayed the arrival of medicines and had halted the immunisation programme in several districts. Thousands of children and mothers were sent back home without vaccination. This is violation of people's right to access health services. Policy makers and national leaders are preoccupied with their own agendas and have shown lesser regard to the substantial problem of malnutrition in Nepal.

Causes of maternal and child malnutrition in Nepal constitute of poverty, socio-cultural, geographical and economic factors, among others while the underlying causes are lack of quality diversified diet, poor caring, lack of education and low utilisation of available health services. Many programmes and activities have been



undertaken by several national and international agencies in Nepal. Results have also been obtained but not up to the mark. The government and agencies have been trying to eradicate the problem in coordination with several international donors and agencies. Responsibilities need to be taken by all relevant stakeholders if we aim to reduce the burden of the problem anytime soon.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing malnutrition among children is pre-requisite for all social and economic development, and is vital for achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Good nutrition provides a strong base for development of the country and provides the much needed structure to ensure that people physically and mentally capable to achieve their potential. This would require attention and effective actions by all relevant stakeholders. Investing in nutrition has great benefits from improving an individual's health to economic prosperity in the long run. Effective policies and interventions must come into play if they ought to bring changes at the grass-root level of the community. Government and non-government agencies need to take responsibilities and work in coordination to derive impact and reduce the burden imposed by malnutrition to the individuals, their families and the country as a whole.

Adequate nutrition is a fundamental right. Nutrition plays vital role in the growth and development of the children not just physical growth but also mental and cognitive capacity of mind develops in between conception to second birthday of a child also called first 1000 days. Nutrition advocacy, promotion and support efforts should be ensured to reach the needy and

marginalised populations. Mere policy and strategy cannot yield foreseeable results, they have to be effectively implemented. There is a strong need to improve the health service delivery systems which can ensure the desired change.

The programmes on nutrition needs to be integrated with livelihood activities to reduce the extent of children suffering from acute malnutrition. Better communication mechanisms needs to be set up for an effective two way communication to occur which could prove vital in raising the awareness level and dissemination of life saving information to the vulnerable people. Furthermore, the government needs to encourage the agricultural production in order to reduce poverty and food scarcity. By investing in nutrition-sensitive agricultural programmes, there can be sustained impact on health and productivity of families.

Women's access to adequate nutrition, including folic acid and iodine must be guaranteed through supplementation or food fortification. The enjoyment of an environment free of harmful chemicals, too, should be assured. And vaccination coverage that can protect pregnant women and their unborn babies from defect-causing diseases such as rubella needs universal access. All concerned sectors such as local development, agriculture, health, education are responsible for improving nutrition for mothers, newborns and children under the age of 5. Long term nutrition goals of the country to be oriented towards significantly reducing malnutrition to the point that it is no longer an impending factor towards development.

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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