

NUTRITION IN NEPAL



**A MONTHLY
MEDIA MONITORING
REPORT, Chaitra 2073**



Cover Photo: Retrieved from <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2015-08-12/children-in-quake-hit-villages-malnourished-govt-report.html>

Study Team

Dr Sushil Baral
Rajesh Ghimire
Sudeep Uprety
Kritagya Regmi
Bipul Lamichhane

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Malnutrition is a serious problem in Nepal, posing severe threats to the health and wellbeing of infants, children and mothers. Malnutrition incorporates a multitude of micronutrient deficiencies which affects all aspects human development and is known to severely impact maternal mortality, birth outcomes, child mortality and morbidity and is also known to impair childhood developments. Proper nutritional diet is critical to avoiding diseases and remaining healthy in the long run. Meanwhile, poor nutrition contributes to reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to diseases, reduced physical and mental development and consequently reduced national productivity.

Low consumption of vegetables and fruits is a major contributing factor for malnutrition in Nepal. A child's gender, residence, family size, family income, maternal education, ethnicity, access to health facilities, safe drinking water and sanitation are all contributing factors to high prevalence of malnutrition in Nepal. Furthermore, several other factors come into play in contributing to high malnutrition prevalence such as political instabilities, strikes, slow economic growth, diseases, illiteracy and social/cultural norms and superstitions.

This study was conducted through a systematic investigation and analysis of 18 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 related agencies. We aimed to recognise the current trends and issues associated with nutrition as illustrated by the media sources and attempted to capture a valid picture regarding the nutritional situation in the country, particularly focusing on the current picture, vulnerabilities, issues and efforts made to fight malnutrition in Nepal.

The accountability of all nutrition stakeholders needs to improve if we are to put an end to this problem. Prompt and immediate actions are required by both the government and the private sectors and better policies are needed to ensure food security and quality in Nepal. More direct and concentrated efforts by all stakeholders is crucial to eliminate the problem of malnutrition and more international support is required.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of malnutrition affects all individuals of a country but particularly affects the women and children the most due to their distinctive physiology and socio-economic characteristics. The situation of malnutrition in Nepal is dreadful particularly among women and children below the age of 5 and had served as a serious barrier for national growth and development. Malnutrition has largely threatened a child's survival, growth and development chances in Nepal. Malnutrition is a serious condition

that occurs when a person's diet does not contain the right amount nutrients that is needed by the body. It refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy or nutrients. According to [WHO](#), malnutrition is part of a vicious cycle that includes poverty and disease and these three factors are interlinked in such a way that each contributes to the presence and solidity of others.

Proper nutrition is vital for developments to occur both at individual levels and national level. An individual suffering from malnutrition lack the energy and strength to perform routine activities and also have reduced creativity and concentration levels. Pervasive hunger and malnutrition are slowly eroding the foundations of Nepal's economy by destroying the potential of millions of children.

Apparently, the quality of agricultural products and food security is very low in Nepal and is accompanied by unhealthy and poor food habits. Lacking knowledge on "What? When? and How to eat?" has caused children from all backgrounds to become malnourished. According to [UNDP's](#) Human Development Index, in Nepal about 55% of the population live under the margins of poverty and is ranked 145 out of 187 countries. This high level of food insecurity and poverty have been a major contributing factor for malnutrition to prevail in Nepalese communities.

This media monitoring sought to track down stories on nutrition in Nepal as reported by the media in an attempt to

identify the current picture and the progress made in this regard. Specifically, this report synthesises the current context of malnutrition in Nepal in terms of nutrition related interventions, malnutrition trends and have insights on how media and other agencies are responding to the problem of malnutrition in Nepal. We also aimed to understand how aid donors, NGOs, businesses and other relevant stakeholders are engaged in nutrition in Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

This media monitoring study involves a systematic investigation of several mainstream print and online media sources and was carried out for a period of one month from March 14 to April 13 (covering the stories of Chaitra 2073 BS). The study involved collecting various media stories by conducting daily monitoring of national print and online media sources namely 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, News 24 and Nepal Samacharpatra. We also, conducted random search in the internet using key words such as 'Nutrition' and 'Food Security'

We gathered a total of 18 media stories concerning nutrition and food security in Nepal. The collected stories were systematically recorded in a spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel) detailing the date, title, sources and links to the news

articles. We also intended to identify the popularity and value of the news articles based on the number of views, shares, likes, comments and the page number in which the news was mentioned. These articles were then further synthesised and categorised into various themes and sub themes for the purpose of analysis.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the media stories have been categorised into the following themes:

CURRENT SCENARIO

According to an article published in [Nepali Times](#), Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014, had indicated that 11.3% children below five years of age are stunted in Nepal and more than 37.4% were stunted. Meanwhile, a survey conducted in Saptari found that 15% of children were suffering from wasting. Nepal's malnutrition rate is one of the highest in the world with more than half of deaths occurring from easily preventable causes.

According to a news report in [Kantipur](#), various programmes such as health insurance and treatment for the malnourished people have been in operation through various government and non-government agencies in districts close to Kathmandu. Most of these programs involves gatherings of Aama Samuha, trainings, discussions and orientation to young girls, counselling to newly married couples and production of sanitary pads. The nutrition packets have been made available in most

district hospitals and health posts. Despite of all this provisions the Chepang and Dalit Communities from the corners of these districts are still suffering from the problems of malnutrition.

The news mentions a story a 6 years old Om Maya Mijar who had been malnourished since she was just 5 months old, despite of all the provisions and facilities that are available in the district headquarters. She is apparently both stunted and wasted and her family is very poor. They cannot afford decent meals on a daily basis. Om Maya had been deprived of proper diet since she was very young and is now suffering from severer malnutrition. Her mother has taken her to the district hospital for treatment as she is now hanging over the uncertainties of life and death according to the report.



[Mother Juthi Mijar with her daughter Om Maya Mijar in District Hospital Dhading](#)

A news story in [News 24](#) mentions that lives of Chepang people living in hilly areas of Chitwan district are getting harder day by day. They live in harsh terrains with extreme climate and low food security. People from these



[Chepang Community from Chitwan](#)

communities survive on very little grains and eat fruits, root vegetables, medicinal herbs and beaten rice as their primary diet. They occupy and inhabit infertile lands, have no access to safe drinking water, lack access to roads, are illiterate and cannot access or afford medical treatment. All these factors have made the lives of these people very hard and the children from these community are very likely to get malnourished and suffer from a wide range of diseases.

In another new report mentioned in [Kantipur](#), despite various programmes concerning agriculture, livestock, food security and Suadhara are in operation they have been largely ineffective and the practice of giving birth at a young age and not taking the child for polio vaccination is widely prevalent in Pyuthan. Due to this, the problems of wasting and stunting are on the rise. Also the practice of early marriage is very high in the district and the children of such couples have been widely found to

be malnourished. According to a study by Agriculture and Food Security Programme, 48 percent of children were found to be stunted, 3% of them to be wasted and 70% of the children under 6 months of age were found to be suffering from anemia.

In Toribang from Nauwahini Village, 2 girls from the same house have been reported to be malnourished and their parents have claimed that they have not been able to feed their 4 children properly due to their financial hardship and the eldest and youngest are suffering from malnutrition and they are 12 and 3 years old respectively. They are weak and are incapable of attending school according to their parents.



[A mother visiting the health facility with her child in Dolakha](#)

According to [Nepal Samacharpatra](#), in a study conducted among children, pregnant and postpartum mothers in Dolakha, revealed that 52 children were



[Health Minister Gagan Thapa](#)

suffering from severe malnutrition, 624 were suffering from moderate malnutrition and 155 pregnant and postpartum mothers were malnourished in the district. The district health office in Dolakha claimed that among the 52 severely malnourished children, 49 have been successfully treated and 3 of them are currently undergoing treatments. There are currently 14 OPDs in the district which can treat malnutrition and in extreme cases refer to Charikot Health Center.

A news report in [Kantipur](#) has revealed that Nepal is better positioned in terms of HDR when compared to several other South Asian countries according to the UNDP report. However, we rank 144 among 188 countries globally, meaning that Nepal is still very poor and the prevalence of malnutrition is very high in Nepal.

ISSUES

According to a new report in [Kantipur](#), Haanku village of Jumla recorded the highest number of child marriage the past year, which indicates that there still exists widespread lack of awareness about the issue. Despite being outlawed in Nepal in 1963, almost 40% of the girls in Nepal marry before the age of 18 according to the Human Rights Watch. This will lead to early pregnancy and birth and financial insecurity which is likely to boost the existing problems of malnutrition in the district.

According to a news published in [Nepali Times](#), in terms of MSNP, the implementation has not been delivered up to the desired standards according to the experts. MSNP which takes a multi-prolonged approach to tackling malnutrition in the country has been scaled up to only 28 districts of the total 75 districts in Nepal to address the problems of acute malnutrition and wasting. According to Chief of Nutrition in Department of Health, Mr. Raj Kumar Pokharel, MSNP has not been implemented as expected and has not been able to reach the household levels due to lack of seriousness, support and coordination from other sectors. Stanley Chitekwe, the Head of Nutrition at UNICEF mentioned that despite the architecture available for delivery, there has been issues with the implementation and it has to be ensured that each ministry makes malnutrition a core part of its business and this is yet to be delivered by the relevant ministries. In an interview with the Health Minister Mr. Gagan

Thapa, published in [Nepali Times](#), he had mentioned about MSNP. He said MSNP is an attractive sounding program with 8 ministries and 12 department's involvement. All ministries and departments are doing their parts but whenever we look for someone who is responsible for certain program, no one is found and this has happened in prior multi sectoral programs in Nepal.

Despite the positive food security status in Sunsari with 80% households having enough food for the entire year, 2.7% of the children in the district are still suffering from malnutrition, primarily due to lack of balanced food despite their positive food security status according to [The Himalayan Times](#).

EFFORTS MADE

[The Himalayan Times](#) reports that the status of food security in Sunsari district has been found to be positive as per the district's food security status assessment report and was found to produce food grains worth around 6 billion Rs annually. The overall situation of food security in district in terms of paddy, wheat, legumes and oilseeds are positive and the annual production is increasing every year. According to the report, 80% of the households had enough food to last the entire year while 20% of the households had normal food security status. This story had also been published in [News 24](#) in Nepali version.

[The Rising Nepal](#) reports about the two day food festival that had kicked off at Bhrikutimandap which was organized by the Department of Food and

Technology and quality Control, Agro enterprise center and Nepal Food Scientists and Technologists Association (NEFOSTA). The event aimed to publicize about the locally available nutritious food items and its importance. The event had 82 stalls, displaying foods from the Hilly, Mountain and Terai region.

According to the [Annapurna Post](#), Om Maya Mijar from Dhading, who had been fighting malnutrition since she was half years old had been provided with free treatment. She belonged to a poor family who could not afford quality food or proper treatment. Nepal Youth Foundation had arranged for her treatment on their own initiative at Lalitpur Poshan Griha after they heard about the news.

According to a news published in [Nepali Times](#) Nepal has been able to significantly reduce the rates of malnutrition from 57% in 2001 to 37.4% in 2014. Nutrition Rehabilitation Homes and Community/Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) had aided a lot in this regard.



[Lumbini District Hospital](#)



[Severely Malnourished Child from Mugu](#)

According to [News 24](#), Lumbini Zonal Hospital at Butwal had been supporting marginalized and underprivileged people on their nutritional rehabilitation. With the collaboration of Child Health Division and Nepal Youth Foundation, has been providing malnourished children from various nearby districts with nutritional support. They admit children below 14 years of age in their rehabilitation homes and provide them with proper care and support. Currently 7 children are being treated at the rehabilitation center. They have also been dissemination crucial nutrition related information to mothers and young women and have the provisions of admitting malnourished mothers along with their children too. Within the last 3 years, 2251 children had been successfully treated and sent home.

The new year 2074 had been kicked off with the campaign “म स्वस्थ-मेरो देश स्वस्थ” (When I am healthy, my nation is healthy) by the Health Minister Mr. Gagan Thapa who has also lead several other campaigns related to tobacco control, low consumption of sugary food

items, reducing air pollution, improving sanitation and water quality, establishing a National Nutrition Center and managing nutrition rights of the people. This story had been published in [News 24](#).

Minister Gagan Thapa stated in an interview, published in [The Himalayan Times](#) that he was proposing to let the health ministry take the lead in nutrition programmes and allocate at least one nutrition officer in each district and let him take charge of all the activities in order to improve the nutritional situation in the country.

Prime Minister Puspa Kamal Dahal and UN Nutrition Joint Secretary Mr. Gerda Verburg discussed about the nutritional situation in Nepal and the nutritional support materials available in Nepal.



[Prime Minister discussing with UN Officials](#)

The PM expressed that the government has prioritised the agenda of feeding nutritious food to the malnourished and vulnerable children. Mr. Gordon expressed his gratefulness towards Nepal's progress in nutrition and mentioned that UN is prepared to help and support Nepal further in this regard. This story had been presented in [Kantipur](#).

According to a news published in [News 24](#), MSNP has been implemented in Mugu in order to improve the contemptible situation of nutrition in the district and a budget of 11 Lakh had been allocated for the purpose. UNICEF in coordination with DoHS and CHD will implement the programme to support pregnant women, post-partum mothers and children below the age of 5. The program aims to improve the wellbeing of children and women in Mugu and reduce the prevalence of stunting and wasting in the district.

In Pyuthan, in order to improve the nutritional situation among children and women, chickens had been distributed to women. The District Livestock Office had provided the chicken, for free, under the Agriculture and Food Security Programme. Each mother had been provided with 4 chicken for meat and eggs according to the office. Due to this program women have been encouraged to eat nutritious food and have been inspired to have their own kitchen gardens to grow their own vegetables according to a news report in [Kantipur](#).

DISCUSSION

The stories we collected suggests that the situation of malnutrition in Nepal is poor particularly among women and children below 5 years of age. The major causes of such high prevalence of malnutrition can be attributed primarily to poverty, low food security, ignorance, political ineffectiveness, superstitions, and low access to health facilities among others.

In many districts of Nepal, the food security levels are poor and many people have been deprived of quality and nutritious food. Particularly people belonging to poor socio-economic backgrounds have been deprived of proper food. Even in districts with good food security, malnutrition is prevalent due to improper food habits and unbalanced diets suggesting that the level of awareness regarding proper diets and nutrition is still low among many vulnerable people in Nepal. Practice of early marriage has also led to financial insecurities among young couples which is known to malnutrition eventually.

Malnutrition is easily preventable with the right support and timely interventions, yet remains an unsolved and largely ignored issue in our country. Despite many programmes and projects being in operation, their impacts are yet to reach the most rural and marginalized communities of Nepal like the Dalit and Chepang communities. Many people from rural areas have little or no access to medical services and health facilities. Lack of knowledge accompanied by illiteracy among the general people have intensified the problem of malnutrition in Nepal.

Discussions have been held with UN chief officials and new policies are being formulated. The government has made nutrition its top priority and the required support is also being received from external agencies and partners. However, the scenario is still far from satisfactory and a lot of interventions and policies need to be designed to

effectively address the problems in various levels of the community. The existing interventions need to be made available in the areas where the problem is most prevalent. The work done in terms of nutrition in Nepal has to be acknowledged, but further works are required if we are to put an end to this problem soon.

Fighting off the problem of malnutrition seems to be a big challenge and government should focus on developing more integrated and practical approaches. Programs such as MSNP need to be implemented with more accountability and ownership by the concerned stakeholders. They need to be held responsible for the implementation of the programmes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nepal is one of the poorest and most undernourished countries in the world. The prevailing social, economic, geographic, educational, political and cultural factors have been a major barrier to fight the existing problem of malnutrition in Nepal. Malnutrition has been further intensified due to the poor food habits, poor care and poor sanitation among children and mothers in Nepal. This problem has been hampering the proper growth, development, health and wellbeing of the people and has been challenging the development ambitions in Nepal.

As the impacts of malnutrition are far and wide, concentrated actions are promptly required to ensure proper

growth, development and wellbeing of the children who are the future manpower of the country. Improving nutrition requires a range of effective policies, programmes and interventions at different levels. Investments in nutrition are important to improve the health of women, children and adolescents. The benefits of such interventions are huge with an investment to return ratio of 1:15 as indicated by the [World Bank](#). The benefits of developing healthy dietary and lifestyle patterns from an early age can positively affect the health of the individuals and growth of the nation. Improving agriculture and food security is one of the fundamental determinants of improving nutritional status. In Nepal, it is evident that more research and investments are required in the agricultural sector to improve the quality as well as availability of food.

Effective policies and interventions must be brought into practice if developments are to be made at the community level. Both government and non-government agencies need to work collectively to achieve the desired results. Coordination, in this regard, is crucial for common ownership and strategic engagement in order to reduce the burden imposed by malnutrition in Nepal. At the beneficiary level, all nutrition interventions need to have well-designed and executed advocacy, social mobilisation and behaviour change communication initiatives. Active participation and support of the general public can then be achieved in order to address the problem of malnutrition effectively.

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.

स्वास्थ्य अनुसन्धान तथा सामाजिक विकास मञ्च
Health Research and
Social Development Forum
www.herd.org.np
email: info@herd.org.np