

NUTRITION IN NEPAL



A MONTHLY MEDIA MONITORING REPORT, Jestha 2074

Issue 7



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Malnutrition is a major public health problem in Nepal with grave impact upon maternal and child health conditions. According to the figures of [Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016](#), 27% of all children below the age of 5 are underweight, and among them 5% are severely underweight. The proportion of children who are underweight is greater in rural areas (31%) than urban areas (23%). Even today children are suffering from malnutrition with the cases of causalities due to malnutrition still prevailing particularly in the remote parts of the country. Many people particularly from underdeveloped areas of Nepal and belonging to poor economic background are still unaware on the importance of nutritious diet for the proper mental and physical development of the children in the long run. Poor nutritional diets has affected proper growth and development of children and has caused many related illness and deaths in the past in Nepal. From a wider perspective, it has also affected the national development and economic growth of Nepal due to the loss of productive labour resulting in lower GDP and has hence served as a serious barrier to national development and has also threatened child's survival and growth chances.

Inadequate consumption of nutritious food is a major contributing factor of such high prevalence of malnutrition in Nepal. Malnutrition in Nepal can be associated with poor feeding and care, insufficient nutrient intake, high rate of infections and complications during pregnancy. Furthermore, a child's gender, type of residence, family structure, economic ability, maternal education, ethnicity, sanitation, access to health services are all contributing factors to child malnutrition. The level of literacy and awareness is also very low in

Nepal and the level of ignorance and carelessness is also unbelievably high particularly among people from rural parts of Nepal. Malnutrition affects maternal mortality, birth outcomes, child morbidity and mortality and affects childhood development.

This study involves a systematic investigation and analysis of 18 print and online media sources, to identify the current scenario of nutrition in Nepal along with the current activities/efforts made on its behalf. We attempted to carefully study the activities that have been made to control and reduce the prevalence of malnutrition by several private and public agencies. Through the media monitoring study, we aimed to recognise current trends and issues surrounding nutrition as per the media sources. Moreover, we sought to capture a valid picture regarding the nutritional situation in Nepal with specific focus on the current situation, vulnerabilities, efforts and progress made in its respect.

It is clear that immediate and effective actions are required by all relevant stakeholder agencies to deal with this persistent problem in Nepal. Better policies are required to ensure food security and diet quality is crucial in reducing the problem of malnutrition in Nepal. Moreover, international support is required as it is evident that this problem cannot be tackled solely by Nepal through its own efforts. More direct and concentrated efforts are required to address malnutrition related problems.

INTRODUCTION

The effects of malnutrition are felt by all individuals of a country but women and children are affected the most by it particularly due to their distinctive physiological and socio-economic

characteristics. The period from birth to two years of age is important to a child for desirable physical, mental, and cognitive growth, health, and development. Similarly, a woman's nutritional status has important implications for her health as well as for her children.

In Nepal, the situation of malnutrition is pitiful among the women and children below 5 years of age and has served as a serious barrier for national growth and development. Malnutrition has largely threatened a child's survival, growth and development chances in Nepal. It is a serious condition that occurs when a person's diet does not contain the right amount of nutrients that is needed by the body. Proper nutrition is vital for development to occur at individual level as well as national level as an individual suffering from malnutrition lack the energy to perform routine activities and have also reduced level of creativity and concentration levels.

In Nepal, lack of awareness and poor access to health services has led to many women being deprived of antenatal and post natal care and very few women deliver their babies in the presence of a Skilled Birth Attendant. This low level of antenatal and postnatal care has resulted in high maternal mortality rates in Nepal. Moreover, many people still don't have access to toilets, and open defecation has contributed to higher prevalence of diarrhea related morbidity further deteriorating the nutritional status. The socio-economic, geographic, economic factors in combination with regressive gender norms has contributed to poor nutrition among millions of women and children below the age of 5 in Nepal. Seasonal food shortage is also another major contributing factor for malnutrition in Nepal.

There has been a lot of efforts made to improve the nutritional and food security situation on Nepal and has also been identified as an important agenda of national development. It has been given a top priority by Government of Nepal. There has also been a strong high level commitment from the government and has been matched with extensive support from the external development partners. Despite a lot of activities ongoing in various parts of Nepal very little noticeable progress has been made as of yet in the overall picture of nutrition 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 current picture and the progress made in this regard. Specially, this report synthesises the current context of malnutrition in Nepal in terms of nutrition related interventions, malnutrition trends and have insights on how aid donors, NGOs, business and other relevant stakeholders are engaged in nutrition in Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

This media monitoring study was conducted for the period of one month from 15th May to 14th June (Jestha). We collected various stories by conducting daily media monitoring of 16 national mainstream and online news sources viz.: The Himalayan Times, My Republica, The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Rajdhani, Annapurna Post, The Rising Nepal, Nagarik, Gorkhapatra, Nepali Times, Himal Khabar, Online Khabar, Setopati, Pahilopost and Nepal Khabar. In addition, random searches were also conducted in the internet with the key words 'nutrition' and 'food security'.

We managed to gather a total of 18 media stories related to nutrition in this month. The

collected stories were recorded in a spread sheet i.e. Microsoft Excel detailing the date, title, sources and links to the story. This study involves a three step process i.e. information finding, information recording and analysis. The collected stories were then synthesised and categorised into various themes and sub-themes. The major findings from our media monitoring study are as follows:

MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings from the stories in the media have been broadly classified into the following three categories i.e. Current Scenario, Issues and Efforts Made.

CURRENT SCENARIO

According to a news published in [Gorkhapatra](#), in Liwang, the headquarters of Rolpa, a 2 years old kid named Bibek Bishwakarma is at risk of dying due to malnutrition. He is reported to be very weak and cannot even sit upright. His father is a labor and has no options but to lock Bibek in a room where he sleeps all day until his father returns home. He has lacked proper care and has been deprived of proper food and support which has resulted in such severe level of malnutrition. The family is very poor and have not been able to feed their two kids properly since they were very young and has resulted in malnutrition among both the kids.

According to an article published in [The Kathmandu Post](#), under-nutrition is responsible for about 50% all deaths that occur among children below the age of 5 in Nepal (UNICEF). Nepal also has 30-40% stunting rate among the children below 5 years of age. Likewise, the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (NMICS) conducted in 2014 had revealed that 37% of children below the age of 5 are stunted i.e. they are too short for their age. Malnutrition rate is high

in Nepal despite the work of the government and donors in the last 15 years. Furthermore, the malnutrition status is higher among the poor, minority communities and people in remote areas. Likewise, maternal nutrition is also very poor in Nepal with a substantial number of young married women being undernourished who are likely to give birth to unhealthy and undernourished children. The article further claims that the root cause of maternal and child malnutrition in Nepal can be attributed to poverty and political instability and further states that lack of adequate calories, poor care, absence of instructions and low use of health services as the immediate cause of malnutrition in Nepal.

Despite the free distribution of iron pills the cases of anemia in Kapilvastu is rising according to a news report in *Nagarik* daily. According to the NDHS 2016, 41% of people in the district were found to be anemic while there were only 35% of such cases in 2011. The problem is most prevalent among post-natal mothers between 15-41 years of age and children between 6-51 months of age. Despite several efforts very little progress has been made in Kapilvastu according to the news report.

According to a report in [Medical Press](#), diarrhea is one of the leading causes of child mortality in developing countries like Nepal. A research published in the Journal of Lumbini Medical College has found that children living in the slums of Nepal are at significant risk of diarrhea. Nutrition, safe drinking water and hygiene/sanitation practices are major contributing factors for diarrhea in slums. The news report states that nutrition has a strong impact on vulnerability of diarrhea and children are trapped in a cycle of malnutrition and diarrhea.

Children in the slum suffer from malnutrition and when they suffer from malnutrition their immunity is reduced and become prone to diarrhea. Likewise, when they suffer from diarrhea, food absorption is affected and they cannot absorb nutrition well.



A news report in [The Kathmandu Post](#), states that in the South Asian region, more than 8 million children under the age of 5 are wasted and 63 million children are stunted. Across South Asia, over 95% of the severely wasted children are not receiving appropriate care and treatment and these wasted children are up to 9 times more likely to die, and among the ones who manage to survive often go on to suffer poor growth and development.

ISSUES

According to a news report in [Republica](#), different ministries are preparing the budget for all 744 local units for the coming fiscal year, but the resource distribution from the center to the local units will more or less be in the same ratio according to the government officials. As per the new constitution, different factors like local revenue, human development index, poverty status, literacy rate, employment situation and price index etc. have to be considered for equitable of resources but the ministries have data of population and geography only. Though the HDI data is available it is of the districts and not the local units. The government agencies

do not have local data of all 744 units making it difficult to plan and disburse budget at the local level.

According to a new report in [The Kathmandu Post](#), climate change has affected women in Nepal by increasing the burden of agricultural work due to which they have less time for their regular activities, increasing their exposure to pesticides which is affecting their health, increasing their dependency on market foods and is also increasing the cost of production due to increased number of labourers and work days and quantity of pesticides. Hence policies and programmes to protect and support women involved in agriculture is needed. An article published in [The Kathmandu Post](#), mentions that children and youth are no longer interested in agriculture and farming and want more screen time these days. Today's generation look down on farming and strives for better urban life. The aging farmers are retiring and the younger generation are unwilling to take over the farm work.



Many youngsters are migrating to foreign destinations seeking work. Lately, there have been a few positive examples of youths who have returned to Nepal and have started working on farms. However, more examples of such youth need to take such initiative to improve agriculture and food security status in Nepal.

EFFORTS MADE

According to a news in [Annapurna Post](#), A 'healthy child' competition is being held in Accham to ensure that no children are born malnourished. The District Health Office in Accham has been holding the competition to provide awareness to the mothers and family members. They have emphasised on the importance of proper and nutritious food for mother and child during the first two years of the child as about 80% of the brain development happens within this period. The competition awards the mothers whose children have the right Body Mass Index (BMI) and who have done all the necessary things to ensure the child's proper health. In addition to this, mothers who regularly come for pregnancy tests, deliver their babies at health center and have completed the vaccine courses are also being presented with the awards.

In order to tackle the growing problem of anemia in Kapilvastu, implementation of Multi Sectoral Nutrition Plan is in operation and a budget of 40 million rupees had also been allocated for the purpose. The District Health Office has also been conducting nutrition related programmes for a long time now. Nutrition education has also been included in the school curriculum to bring forth changes in the attitudes and behavior of the people in the district.

According to a news published in [The Himalayan Times](#), a two day international conference on child health and development organized under Action against Hunger had been commenced in the valley. Director General of the Department of Health Services (DoHS) at Ministry of Health (MoH), Dr. Rajendra Lal Panta inaugurated the conference and said the conference is very significant for child and maternal health. The conference

discussed 15 different working papers to be presented by experts on child development and mental health from within the country and abroad. Research scholars on child health and development from Nepal, India, America, Bangladesh, Britain and South Africa among other countries had participated in the conference. A version of this story had also been covered by [Republica](#).



[Director General of DoH, Inaugurating a 2 day International Conference on Child Health and Development](#)

According to an article in [The Kathmandu Post](#), major strides have been made in increasing life expectancy and reducing some of the common killers associated with child and maternal mortality and significant progress has been made on increasing access to clean water and sanitation, reducing malaria, tuberculosis, polio and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

According to [The Himalayan Times](#), nutrition stakeholders have stressed on the need for effective awareness campaign to reduce malnutrition in Nepal. The recent NDHS 2016, has pointed out that 7 out of 10 children in Nepal are still living with anemia hence the effective awareness and advocacy and awareness was stressed by the stakeholders during Media Interaction on Nutrition and Food Security. The session highlighted how media can explain about nutrition in an easy and effective way and how they can make recommendations to the policy makers for coming up with better policies to combat malnutrition.



[Women from Accham who have stopped barring dairy and meat products](#)

According to [The Kathmandu Post](#), currently, a worldwide campaign is being conducted to put resources into nutrition during the 'Golden 1000 days'. This effort has been inspired by reports published by researchers that a child's brain develops rapidly from birth to three years of age. Political parties should hence have a plan to create quality and focused human capital by enhancing nutrition of mothers and children. This is an opportunity for all parties to have an effective programme of activities to build accessible quality health services and sanitation to break the endless cycle of malnutrition. All parties should have sectorial plans like governance, administration, agriculture, health care, water system and so forth to enhance nutrition for the development of future human capital. Nepal needs to expand interest in nutrition with

year-round exercises from the base up. Currently, under the federal framework, all parties should develop motivation among their cadres at the local level.

According to a news published in [E Kantipur](#), the new budget tabled by the government has given a due focus on empowering the newly-formed local bodies, allocating 17.6%

of the total budget of 1270 billion rupees for 744 units. Through the budget, the government has also authorised the local bodies to manage all the expenditure and operations of the health centers, health posts and sub health posts. ccination, nutrition planning and

telemedicine will now be administered by the local bodies and the government has allocated the budget accordingly for the purpose.

According to a news published in [Mahila Khabar](#), women in Accham have started being aware on the importance of nutrition for the mother and child from the period of pregnancy to 2 years of age. Even women from the most remote parts of Accham have started being aware on the importance of regular checkup during pregnancy, taking iron pills and deworming pills, completing the vaccine courses and delivering the baby at a health center. After delivering the baby they have also been aware of the things to do during the first 1000 days of the baby's life. According to the news, women have stopped barring yogurt, milk, green vegetables, fruits, meat, eggs etc. and have

stopped following the traditional belief, originating from superstitions and misbeliefs that barred them from consuming the above mentioned.

According to a news published in Dadelhdhura Post, 12 schools in Dadelhdhura have been provided with WASH materials under the Multisectoral Nutritional Programme in the district. In the 18th National Cleanliness Week, each of the 12 schools were provided with materials worth 28,940 rupees with the support of UNICEF. The schools had been provide with materials such as water tanks, dustbins, buckets, soaps, towels, toilet brush, harpic, nail cutters and water pipers based upon the individual requirements of the schools.

According to a news published in [Relief Web](#), over 75,000 people in eight countries are to benefit from nine projects totaling \$2.3 million committed by Canadian Food Grains Bank in May. An agriculture and livelihood project and nutrition project in Nepal through Mennonite Central Committee Canada has been planned, totaling \$165,000 and benefitting 9,900 people. Another article in [Relief Web](#) states that a regional conference organized jointly by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) will identify actions to accelerate progress in the care of severely wasted children, which affects 8 million children in South Asia. It will bring together, for the first time, government representatives, UN partners and civil society organizations from across South Asia, together with regional and global experts on nutrition to exchange regional analyses, expertise and experience on addressing wasting in the context of overall nutrition programming. Community-based approaches are indeed critical to preventing and treating severe wasting. Over 50 countries have adopted

community-based management of severe wasting, including Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan. This community-based care approaches are already saving thousands of lives and safeguarding the growth and development of many more Children by bringing more affordable services closer to families.

DISCUSSIONS

This study states that malnutrition has severely threatened the lives of infants and mothers in Nepal. Children in Nepal are continuously being affected with malnutrition and the adverse effects of it are felt by the entire nation. The prevalence of malnutrition is still very high despite being accorded a top priority by the government. Despite several interventions and targeted programmes many mothers and children have been deprived of proper care and nutritious food in Nepal.

In this month's study, we noticed that there has been very less media coverage on stories related to nutrition. The major underlying reason for this could be ascribed to the transition of Nepal's unitary system into the federal system. Furthermore, the first round of local elections that was held last month and the second phase of election due to be held this month has been the major area of media attention. More news on pre-election campaigns, budget planning and resource distribution have covered the newspapers. Sometimes a single story makes all the headlines and sometimes such cases go unnoticed and unreported by the media. This demonstrates a lack of consistency and prioritisation regarding the widely prevalent problem of malnutrition in Nepal.

The food security in Nepal is also seemingly very poor. There is very little polices that ensure food security and also more focus is

given in producing high volume of agricultural products rather than on producing nutritious and quality products. Furthermore, the youth today have very little interest in agriculture and most of them prefer going abroad and living an urban life. Youth these days are reluctant to adhere to the traditional agricultural practices followed by their parents further endangering the food security situation in Nepal.

Nepal is a poor country with many people living below the margins of poverty. People from poor economic backgrounds are usually found to be suffering from malnutrition primarily due to unaffordability of nutritious food. Children like Bibek Biswakarma number in many in Nepal and go largely unnoticed. In urban areas, people from slum areas are one of the main victims of malnutrition. They are victims of diarrhea and malnutrition, which comes together as part of a vicious cycle. Likewise, many women are also suffering from anemia due to lack of iron enriched food intake. Despite being provide with free iron pills, many women, particularly from the underdeveloped parts of Nepal suffer from iron deficiency during their pregnancy, which can have fatal implications upon the mother as well as the child.

Programmes such as MSNP has been in operation in many districts of Nepal where the problem persists the most. MSNP has helped to bring forth improvements in various parts of Nepal through an integrated and multi-sectoral approach. In Dadeldhura, many hygiene and sanitation materials are being distributed in schools in urban areas. Such interventions is likely to have foreseeable impacts on improving the nutritional status among children. Also holding competitions like 'Healthy Baby' completion has played a significant role in bringing forth awareness among mothers

and has contributed to behavioral change among them. Also through such initiative, women have stopped following the traditional beliefs which barred women from consuming nutritious food like dairy products and meat items.

Despite being easily preventable, malnutrition has remained a major and unsolved problem in our country. Despite many programmes and projects being in operation, most of these have not been able to derive the desired results in Nepal over the past decades. Many people from rural areas still do not have access to medical services and health facilities. In addition, lack of knowledge accompanied by illiteracy among the general people have further intensified the already prevailing problem of malnutrition in Nepal.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Adequate nutrition is a fundamental right and plays a vital role in the growth and development of the children. It is responsible not only for the physically growth, the mental and cognitive capacity of children also develops within their first 2 years of life (1000 days). The major cause of such large nutritional deficiencies can be attributed to poverty, low levels of food security, lack of education and awareness, superstitions, ignorance and political ineffectiveness. Fighting this problem is a big challenge and requires more integrated and practical approaches. Mere policy formulation cannot yield desired results and required rigorous implementation. There is also a strong need to improve the health service delivery systems to ensure desired changes.

Addressing malnutrition among children is pre-requisite for all social and economic development, and is also vital for achieving

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Good nutrition provides a strong base for national development and provides a structure to ensure that people are physically and mentally capable to achieve their potential. Women's access to adequate nutrition, like folic acid, iron and iodine must be guaranteed by the government through supplementation of food fortification. Furthermore, the vaccine coverage that protects pregnant women and their unborn babies must be made universal.

Tackling this problem would require attention and effective actions at the grass root levels of the community by all the relevant stakeholders. It has to be understood that 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 action if we are to progress in this regard.

Public and private organisations need to take responsibilities and need to work in coordination to derive impact and reduce the burden imposed by malnutrition. Their interventions need to involve well designed advocacy, social mobilisation and behaviour change communication initiatives. Furthermore, active participation and support of the general public is vital to effectively address this problem.

All concerned stakeholders and sectors such as local development, agriculture, health and education are responsible for improving nutrition for mothers, newborns and children under the age of 5. Nepal's long term goal needs to be oriented towards significantly reducing malnutrition to avoid its adverse effects onto the individuals and the nation as a whole.

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.

Health Research and Social Development Forum

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