



# NUTRITION IN NEPAL

TheRisingNepal  
Rajdhani  
NepaliTimes Nagarik  
Kantipur Setopati  
Gorkhapatra TheKathmanduPost  
TheHimalayanTimes  
Pahilopost  
HimalKhabar Republica  
NayaPatrika  
NepalKhabar

## A MONTHLY MEDIA MONITORING REPORT, Mangshir 2073



Cover Photo: *Sunita Sunar of Dhawang - 2, Rolpa with her one year old daughter Nirmala who is only of 4.5 kg.*

Credit: Kabita Upadhaya/Rolpa,

Courtesy: Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS)

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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 Poush 2074 BS as part of the 'Support to Implementation of MSNP' project.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nepal is among the poorest countries in the world with [25.2%](#) of its population living below the poverty line. It ranks 145<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries as per [UNDP's](#) 2014 Human Development Index. Wide concerns have been expressed about the present situation of nutrition and its consequent effects in the context of Nepal. Many studies done in Nepal demonstrated that there exists a large gap in terms of demand and supply of nutritious food. In Nepal, the causes of under nutrition vary by geographic, economic, social, and household levels.

Poor nutrition poses a great risk to Nepal's development and to the well-being and achieving the full potential of the people. Stagnant growth and political instability have contributed to acute food shortages and high rates of under nutrition, mostly affecting vulnerable women and children in the hills and mountains of the mid- and far-western regions. Though rates of stunting and underweight have decreased and the rate of exclusive breastfeeding has increased in the past seven years, about [41%](#) of children under five still remain stunted. Nepal faces many challenges to economic growth and human development, including poor access to power, the lowest road density in South Asia, high susceptibility to climate change, vulnerability to earthquakes, and weak governance. The [agriculture sector](#) employs 64 % of the population but accounts for only 34 % of GDP and growth is constrained by low productivity and limited market access.

This media monitoring involved a systematic investigation of 16 mainstream print and online media sources, to identify the current status and the efforts made to tackle the problem of malnutrition in Nepal. We intended to identify the current trends and progress made in terms of nutrition through this media monitoring study. We aim to be able to identify and extract relevant information regarding the nutritional status to help understand ways to tackle the existing problem of under nutrition in the country.

## INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition reduces a child's survival chances, causes permanent impairment of physical development, and spreads poverty by reducing achievement in school and future earnings. Nepal is known to be one of the most under-nourished countries in the world with a serious problem of protein deficiency. Poor nutrition features as one of the major public health concern in Nepal. According to [USAID](#), in Nepal, among the children below 5 years of age, over 41% are suffering from stunting, 11% are suffering from wasting and 29% from underweight. Due to low socio-economic, geographic and educational factors, along with regressive gender norms, women and children have poor nutritional status in Nepal.

This media monitoring aimed to keep track of media coverage on nutrition in Nepal and was an attempt to identify the current scenario and the progress made in tackling the problem of malnutrition in Nepal.

We sought to have a quick look at the context of nutrition in Nepal as reported in the Media in order to gain an understanding of the problem and to come up with ideas and recommendations to tackle the problem. Through this media monitoring we aimed to track the nutritional campaigns, discover the malnutrition trends, discover the nature and extent of malnutrition, and obtain insight on how media and other agencies are responding to the problem of malnutrition in Nepal.



Source: Creation Umesh, [Healthy Eating Habits](#)



## **METHODS**

This media monitoring study was carried out for a period of one month from November 15 to December 15.

The stories were collected by conducting daily media monitoring of national mainstream and online sources national namely: The Himalayan Times, Republica, Nagarik, The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Rajdhani, Annapurna Post, The Rising Nepal, Gorkhapatra, Nepali Times, Himal Khabar, Online Khabar, Setopati, Pahilopost and Nepal Khabar.

A total of 16 media stories related to nutrition were recorded in Microsoft Excel detailing the date, title, sources and links to the article. These articles were then synthesised and categorised into the various themes and sub-themes. The major findings from our media monitoring are discussed below:

## MAJOR FINDINGS

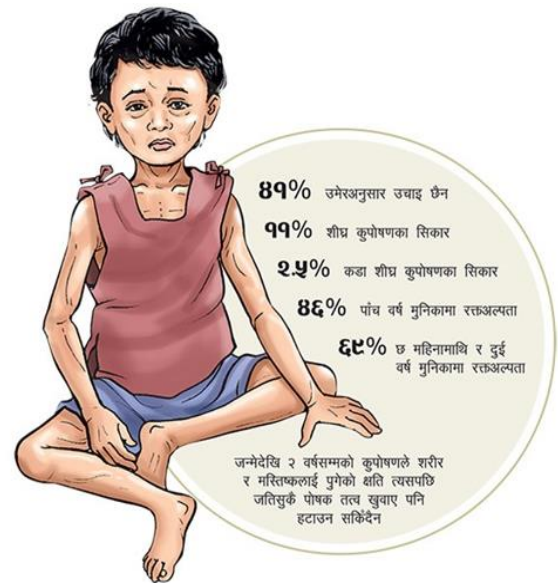
### Current Scenario

According to news reports, the situation of nutrition is poor in Saptari district and over 28% of the 570,000 people in [Saptari](#) live below the poverty line and 2.6% of the total population are known to be malnourished. Despite the huge investment of 119.7 million rupees under the Sunaula 1000 Din Programme in Saptari, the district is not being able to combat the problem of malnutrition.

In [Kalikot](#), 824 children are suffering from malnutrition out of which 301 children are suffering from severe malnutrition. The district Health office in Kalikot has trained and mobilized 212 health workers to identify and treat the malnourished children in the district.

In [Bajhang](#), 410 children under the age of five are suffering from malnutrition, among them 112 children are suffering from severe malnutrition.

In [Bajura](#), hundreds of women get married and give birth at an early age, putting their own and their baby's health in jeopardy and many women have faced various health complications at the time of delivery. Also the population of women giving birth to three to five children before the age of 20 is extremely high in the district.



Source: EKantipur, [फेलिँदै कपोषण](#)

Children from Hilly Regions and Terai Region are being deprived of the much needed nutrition which is known to have severe long term health effects of these children.

This will reduce their immunity and will deprive their proper physical and mental growth. Furthermore, in Nepal, not just the children living under poverty but also the children from rich families are suffering from under nutrition due to lack of awareness. Also it has been found that children who are underweight during birth have a much higher chance of getting type 2 diabetes in Nepal.

A study conducted in Kathmandu Valley revealed that more and more adolescent and young girls are suffering from eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia in Kathmandu. A large proportion of urban youth fail to maintain a balanced diet, causing several health problems and are likely to face serious health problems as they grow older. Also, in Nepal, the consumption of fruit and fresh vegetables is very low, which contributes to the nutritional disorders such as deficiencies in iron and vitamin A.

According to NHRC, in Nepal about 71% boys and 81% girls have malnutrition. About 63% of these malnourished children live in cities and 68% of them live in villages. Furthermore, it was found that terai region was the most severely affected region and Muslim people were the highest affected people by malnutrition.

Moreover, according to a news report, UN claims that milk and dairy products have become an unexpected aid in the fight against malnutrition. UNFAO recommends a minimum of 92 liters of milk consumption by a person per year while only 58 liters of milk is consumed by a Nepali person per year. Nepal is currently facing a milk deficit of 400,000 liters a day.

### **Efforts to Tackle Malnutrition**

In Panchthar, the Sunaula 1000 Din (Golden Thousand Days) campaign has been implemented in 10 VDCs that are at high



Source: *The Himalayan Times*, [Heavy investments change little for Saptari's malnourished](#)

are at high risks of malnutrition. The campaign will ensure activities including regular health check-up, distribution of nutritious food to pregnant women, and timely administration of vaccines to mothers and their infants. Also in [Bajura](#), a special treatment for malnutrition has begun in various health facilities with the help of UNICEF and Integrated Rural Health Development Training Center Nepal under the Ministry of Health.

The treatment involves mobilizing health workers at villages, distribution of antibiotics, vitamins and nutritious foods. Bajura is one of the most affected regions by malnutrition and over 47% of the children here are suffering from malnutrition.

In [Karnali](#), the Ministry of Health has urged the health facilities to maintain an OPD for the children suffering from malnutrition. In the first phase it has planned to establish OPDs in 80 health facilities in Karnali in order to provide better care and supervision to children suffering from severe malnutrition.

According to news sources, the government is set to prepare a [report](#) detailing the effectiveness of and ways to improve various programs such as Nutritional Support Programme, Sunaula 1000 Din programme, Child Grants Program and Day Snacks Program for improving the nutritional situation in the country.

## DISCUSSION

Findings from our media monitoring study suggested that the nutritional condition in Nepal is poor. In districts like Saptari, Kalikot, Bajhang and Bajura majority of children and women are being deprived of the essential nutrients that are vital for their growth and development. Furthermore, due to lack of awareness and proper support, thousands of women in Nepal face severe complications during the time of delivery risking the life of the child. Malnourished children are likely to face severe long term health effects and are known to have a negative impact on Nepal's GDP and eventually the economic growth.



Source: *The Himalayan Times*,  
[Malnutrition rife due to early marriage, pregnancy](#)



Such children are also likely to suffer from type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, many adolescent and young girls in Kathmandu are known to be suffering from eating disorders causing adverse effect on their health and the health of their future children.

Poor health accompanied by poor sanitation, poor early childcare practices, poor agricultural investments and poor priority settings malnutrition have been supporting factors for malnutrition in Nepal. The Government of Nepal does realize that the issue of malnutrition must be addressed as a priority. Nutrition and food security has been one the high priority agendas of the government. However, much progress is required in order to mainstream nutrition in the national development agendas.

To address the issue of malnutrition in Nepal, the government developed a National Multi-sector Nutrition Plan (MSNP) for improving maternal and child nutrition and reducing chronic malnutrition jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture and Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Urban Development.

The plan offers a package of activities and interventions with prioritized strategic objectives which, over a period of five years, which should contribute to a one third reduction of the current prevalent rates of chronic malnutrition. Programmes such as Sunaula 1000 Din, Nutritional Support Programme, Child Grants Programme, and Suadhara have been activated by the government to prevent and control malnutrition among the vulnerable population in Nepal. The government has been taking initiative by mobilizing health workers and volunteers in the most vulnerable areas of the country to reduce the extent of negative impact caused by malnutrition.

Malnutrition increases the risk of mortality in the early stages of infancy and childhood, impairs cognitive function of those who survive and hinders efforts of social and economic development. There is low level of awareness and lack of proper health care facilities in Nepal. Providing timely and



Source: EKantipur, फेरिङ्ग कुपोषणग्रस्त बालिका

proper care is needed to tackle the problem of malnutrition in Nepal in the long run. People need to be given awareness and attempt needs to be made in changing their care seeking behavior. Many people from rural areas in Nepal are still found to be visiting traditional healers (*Dhami/Jhakri*) for treatment rather than going to a nearby health facility.

## **CONCLUSION and MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite the government's various efforts in partnership with line agencies to combat the nutritional problems, significant positive outcomes results haven't been achieved. Mere policy and strategy formulation is insufficient to yield foreseeable results in nutrition in Nepal. There is a strong need to improve the service delivery systems which can ensure the desired change. Poor feeding and care practices, insufficient nutrient intake, high rate of infection and teenage pregnancy are the immediate causes of chronic malnutrition in Nepal.

There is a need to strengthen the institutional framework and capacity; increase resource allocation to scale up and sustain proven nutrition interventions; and stress multi-sectoral actions to tackle the underlying causes of under-nutrition. Programmes like food fortification and supplementation needs government's active participation in the form of policy guideline preparation, resource allocation and manpower mobilisation. Breastfeeding also needs to be encouraged to ensure proper nutrition of infants and children.

There is a need to increase the availability of food at the community level through homestead food production, access to clean and cheap energy sources such a biogas and improved cooking stoves, and the education of men to share household loads. Provision of nutrition education may play a pivotal role in improving the nutritional status particularly of children and women of the rural community. The Government of Nepal should give first priority to the nutrition interventions and their actions needs to be made more visible and strategic planning should be done before starting any nutritional programmes.

Holistic concepts to address underweight, stunting, and wasting should be launched separately from programmes that address the nutritional problems as a whole. Furthermore, there should be effective management functions at all levels of government health services. Since causative factor of nutritional problems are multi factorial in nature, a coordinated effort is required as envisaged by National Planning Commission for MSNP to bring together various sectors on board for integrated planning and execution of 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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