

NUTRITION IN NEPAL



A MONTHLY MEDIA MONITORING REPORT, Ashar 2074

Issue 8



Cover Photo: [Shiladevi Mahara with her Children.](#)

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Study Team

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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 Kartik 2074 BS.

Executive Summary

This study involves a systematic investigation and analysis of 19 print and online media sources, to identify the current scenario of nutrition in Nepal along with the current activities/efforts made on its behalf. Through this study, we wish to highlight the fact that malnutrition continues to be a major public health problem in Nepal, which has a severe with grave impact upon maternal and child health conditions. According to the figures of [Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016](#), 36% of children under five are stunted and 10% are wasted. 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%) (NDHS 2016).

We conducted a media monitoring to study the efforts 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 the concerned bodies have to gear up and take necessary steps to address the problem of malnutrition in the country. There is a need of proper implementation of the policies. A strong monitoring body has to be formed to ensure food security and diet quality. Many programmes related to nutrition are being run, it should reach every corner of the implemented district. Health institutions should have well trained human resource and should be well equipped. 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 Government of Nepal has put the issue of nutrition and food security in its top priority. Nutrition has been identified as one of the important agendas of national development. There has also been a strong high level commitment from the government and external development partners. The government has started providing allowance for women opting for institutional delivery. Regardless of numerous ongoing activities and programmes in various parts of Nepal very little progress has been noted.

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 June to 15th July (covering the month of Ashar 2074 BS). HERD team 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'.

The monitoring team managed to gather a total of 19 media stories related to nutrition during this period. The collected stories were recorded in a spreadsheet 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

As per the report published in Rajdhani Daily there are 7784 children in the seven Rural Municipalities of Humla District, of the total, [773 children are suffering from malnutrition](#) in the district. According to the District Health Office, of the total, 62% are girls and 38% are boys among the total malnourished children.

Majority of these children represent Tamang community. The children are said to be suffering from malnutrition due to the lack of proper care during golden thousand days. Early marriage, less consumption of the locally produced food products, lack of cleanliness, lack of access to health service and lack of awareness among mothers are the major reasons behind it. Additionally, the attraction towards the junk foods has also contributed to the problem. There are currently 212 malnourished children in Tajakot rural municipality, 145 in Adanchulika, 94 in Simakot, 72 in Kharpunath and 136 in Chankhelika in the district.

In Kalaiya sub municipality 10 Matiawarki of Bara district, a big billboard can be seen with pictures of mother and child for the golden thousand days. A group has also been formed there under the [Golden 1000 days](#) programme. Shiladevi Mahara, 27, lives nearby but [two of her children are malnourished](#). She sees the billboard everyday but has no idea what the programme does. Her family has not been able to afford nutritional food due to poverty, which has posed risk to their lives. She has expressed that meat, green vegetables and milk is like a dream for her. She is only one example, the news published in Kantipur has stressed that there are many families from Dalit and marginalized communities who are bearing the same problem.

In Bhojpur, another mother Nirmala Raut is going through the similar problem. She has been very worried and upset as her daughter Sudikshya's [health condition has been worsening](#) day by day. She complained that Sudikshya's body starts becoming blue and it seems like her breathing has been stopped. Illiterate Nirmala and her family went to traditional healers in the beginning.



[Nirmala Raut with daughter Sudikshya Raut](#)

[Photo credit: Annapurna Post](#)

Later, they were suggested to consult a doctor. Nirmala took her daughter to Biratnagar for treatment but was very disappointed when the doctors informed that she has to be taken to India. She talked to her husband who is working abroad. He suggested to continue the treatment. But she **returned as they didn't have enough money** and the doctors informed that even if she takes her daughter to India, there is no guarantee she will be treated. There are many children suffering from malnutrition in the district. Lack of awareness, poverty and low level of awareness are the main reasons behind it. The health centres can provide

them treatment and counselling, but the health centre itself is unaware about the presence of malnourished children in the district. Most of the malnourished child are from the marginalized communities.

The news published in [Kantipur daily](#) has pointed on the need of proper fund management and monitoring body for the [Golden 1000 days programme](#). The reporter, Laxmi Saha writes that since the beginning of the golden thousand days programme, the officials and the committee formed had been using the funds for other purposes. The fund allocated for the project wasn't used after the officials claimed fake bills. The story claims that "since the beginning of the programme, 180 million NRP budget was received but only 50 million NRP was spent. There were no signs of noteworthy reduction in malnutrition among the targeted group." "The programme was said to be ineffective as the officials organised programmes only at the end of the fiscal year and claimed fake bills", [the story claims](#).

According to a study conducted by the District Health Office, Tanahun, over 25 per cent girls below the child-bearing age become mothers in the district. The study, conducted in the first six months of this fiscal, found that [girls as young as 14 were becoming mothers](#) and that the number of young mothers were increasing in the district. The scenario is said to have an adverse effect on the health of the mother as well as

the child. To tackle the scenario, the officials at the district health office have planned various programmes to raise awareness about maternal health among the public. According to data, as many as 9,734 pregnant women had their pregnancy tested at the health facility.

[Shiladevi Mahara with her Children](#)

[Photo Credit: Kantipur](#)



A situation report prepared by Nepal Food Security Monitoring System or Nepal Khadhya Surakshya Anugaman Pranali (NeKSAP) has revealed that overall, out of 3,367 VDCs and municipalities in 74 districts, the District Food Security Networks (DFSNs) classified 48 VDCs as highly food insecure, 183 VDCs as moderately food insecure, and 3,136 VDCs and municipalities as minimally food insecure. These districts are said to be at a [high risk in terms of food security](#). Of these VDCs identified as highly food insecure, 11 are in Gorkha district, 10 each in Mugu and

Humla districts, nine in Bajura district, five in Dhading district and three in Kalikot district.

Issues

Nepal was ranked 91st among 128 countries in the world in social progress. The [Social Progress Index-2017](#) published by Social Progress Imperative, a non-profit organisation based in Washington, classifies Nepal as one of the 'Lower Middle Social Progress' countries with a score of 60.08 on a scale of 0 to 100 on SPI. Nepal has made marginal improvement in the SPI score from 57.4 (95th) among 133 countries in 2016 to 60.08 (91st) this year. Many Lower Middle Social Progress Tier countries including Nepal are performing strongly compared to countries with similar income, including Nepal and Senegal, which have made great strides in governance and health.

The 2017 Index includes data from 128 countries on 50 indicators and covers 98 per cent of the world's population. The SPI is an aggregate of measures including water and sanitation, advanced education, nutrition, shelter, personal safety, personal freedom, tolerance and inclusion, personal rights, health and wellness, access to ICT, ecosystem sustainability and access to basic knowledge.

According to a report by World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women, [child marriage](#) will cost developing

countries trillions of dollars by 2030, seriously hampering global efforts to eradicate poverty. Ending child marriage would cut population growth and boost girls' educational achievements and earning ability, boosting national prosperity. About 15 million girls a year are married before the age of 18 globally– one girl every two seconds.

Children born to child brides are more at risk of death or poor development due to lack of good nutrition. As the child bride themselves are not physically strong and aware they fail in providing proper nourishment to the child. Child brides are much more likely to drop out of school, affecting their future ability to earn money. Ending child marriage could increase national earnings by an average of 1 percent. Reducing populations would also produce big savings in national education budgets. Eliminating child marriage would save countries 5 percent or more of their education budget by 2030.

Research published recently in the [Journal of Lumbini Medical College](#) has found that children living in the slums of Nepal's small hill towns are at significant risk of diarrhoea. The study revealed that of the 450 children under five years of age living in the slums of the Tansen municipality in the Palpa district, 40 percent were found to have suffered from diarrhoea in the previous three months. The risk of diarrhoea was much less for children who had been exclusively breast-fed for six

months. Of the 181 children who had diarrhoea, 174 had not been breast-fed exclusively for six months while only seven had been breast-fed exclusively.

Nutrition, the source and treatment of drinking water, hand washing practice and family income were other variables related to diarrhoea in the slums. Nutrition had a strong impact on vulnerability to diarrhoea. The children are said to be trapped in a cycle of malnutrition and diarrhoea.

[Efforts made](#)

A new book on health and wellbeing, titled [Khana Khanu Bhayo?](#) Hamra Bhansa Bare Bazar Ka Bhram \ written jointly by Dr Aruna Upreti and Laxman Adhikari was launched. The book revolves around the false assumptions abound in the market about food and lifestyle.

[Golden Thousand Days programme](#) has become more effective this year in Rautahat district after District Coordination Committee started monitoring the project. The programme introduced to save pregnant women of impoverished and marginalised communities and babies up to two years from malnutrition was said to be less effective in the past years. But it became more effective after the target groups were motivated through different awareness programmes organised in villages.

According to the news published by Rastriya Samachar Samitee, the government has allocated 1.2 NRP for Nutrition Sensitive and food security programmes in Jajarkot district. Likewise, the district has received 91 lakhs under MSNP budget and the total budget has been allocated as 18 Lakhs for District Livestock Service Office, 18 Lakhs for District Agriculture Development Office, 14 Lakhs for District Education Office, 14 Lakhs for Drinking Water and Sanitation Office, 14 Lakhs for District Women and Children Office and 13 Lakhs for District Coordination Committee. Altogether 91 Lakhs has been allocated of which 50% has already been provided to the concerned office. Likewise, the golden 1000 days programme was introduced in Jajarkot to improve the nutritional status of children, women and youths. This programme has been introduced in the six VDC Nayakbada, Ramidada, RokayaGau, Daha, Kortang and Gorkhakot which has been deprived of nutrition, health, agriculture and transportation.

The [students from different schools in Jajarkot](#) district called on the newly elected local level representatives to ensure their rights and address their concerns. Attention of the concerned bodies was drawn towards child marriage and child labour. At the programme organised by District Child Welfare Committee, Jajarkot, the participants discussed a range of issues, including nutrition, children's involvement in

development projects, child rights, among other topics. Bheri Municipality Mayor Chandra Prakash Gharti assured he would take initiatives to address children's concerns in the plan and policies of the municipality.

Chameli Raidas of Somdiha, Yasodhara Rural Municipality has planted a lot of vegetables in 6 Dhur (1093.5 sq.ft) land. The land which remained unused earlier now looks very attractive with seasonal vegetables. She has been feeding the same vegetable to her daughter in law who is 7 months pregnant. As it is the first child Chameli wants to make sure the mother and the child get good amount of nutrition. Although the Raidas family is economically weak they were able to use the land for growing vegetables with the support of the District Agriculture Development Office, tells the news published by Kapilbastu Darshan Weekly.

Similarly, Amina Giddi of Sauraha, Belabhariyas also started producing vegetables in 10 Dhur (1822.5 Sq. ft.) land with the support of District Agriculture Development Office. The land, which had been unused, is now producing vegetable throughout the year, which is enough for her family. Like them, 14 other people started growing vegetables with the support of Agriculture office in the district.

In the rural areas, the income generating programmes have geared up with the establishment of Agriculture offices. The

office has been organizing awareness programmes related to farming and importance of nutrition. For this in the last fiscal year the office has supported to make 1660 vegetable garden with the aim to tackle with malnutrition status of the district.

The government has developed [Total Sanitation Guideline](#), which recognises sanitation as an integral part of nation-building. The guideline aims to enhance capacity as well as responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders related to education, health, water, nutrition, environment, women, children, climate change and disaster management. The guideline is expected to promote utilisation of available services and facilities in a sustainable way by also considering the production and income generation activities as far as possible while expanding and upgrading waste, sanitation and hygiene services and user-friendly facilities. It also ensures water supply facility to achieve total sanitation condition, lays emphasis on proper management of sanitation in schools and health institutions, including various public agencies and organisations and public places to achieve total sanitation for all by 2030.

Discussion

This media monitoring study has strengthened the fact that the situation of malnutrition in Nepal is terrible particularly

among the women and children below 5 years of age. Despite being one of the top priorities of the government and efforts from various levels, the nutritional status is poor in many parts of the country. Numerous mothers and children have been deprived of proper care and nutritious food. This has affected the development of the entire nation.

Like previous months, very less media coverage on stories related to nutrition has been noted in **this month's study**. The change in the government system can be regarded as a major reason. Additionally, the second phase of election was held last month and media attention was fully provided to the results. More news about the elections and the parties further planning have covered the newspapers. The media sometimes provide a huge space to a story **but at times similar stories aren't even covered**. This shows the preference of media in political issues rather than emerging health issues like nutrition.

Also this month the number of stories were somewhat similar to the previous month. Higher prevalence of malnutrition in girls than in boys in Humla could be because of the existing practice of discrimination among boys and girls in Nepal. Boys are always prioritized and are provided with good food and education while the girls are fed poorly and are made to do all the domestic chores. Lack of timely and valuable information is

also a major factor for the deaths of many children in Nepal. Most of the people who are directly or indirectly the victims of malnutrition are largely unaware about the underlying causes and the solutions to this problem.

People lack knowledge and awareness on healthy food habits and balanced diet. The news published about the people being unaware about the golden thousand days in the area where it is being implemented, has also questioned on the effectiveness of the programme. Malnutrition is still prevalent in places where different programmes related to nutrition is ongoing. This has questioned about the implementation of the programme.

Another case has pointed on the **family's** preference to traditional healers before visiting the health facility. This has shown how unaware the people in rural areas are about malnutrition and the best place to seek health services. Although being guided by various bodies to the health institution, poverty has played a big role in getting the service. 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 Sudikshya number in many in Nepal and go largely unnoticed.

The families due to poverty cannot afford treatment which has many consequences. There is a need to introduce programmes where such families are provided necessary support. Despite the government launching some programmes, they are not running smoothly due to the bad intentions of the officials. Lack of strong monitoring and good leadership have led to the unsuccessful implementation of the programme. Although adequate budget is available, the fund is not being used properly.

In Tanahun, children 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. Child marriage is also a major cause of malnutrition. Over 25 per cent girls below the childbearing age become mothers in Tanahun. This has posed risk to both mother and the child.

Many interventions and programmes designed and implemented by the government along with several other organizations and line agencies have still not been able to reach the grass root level of the communities. Children are still dying and many affected individuals and families are being deprived of adequate support and timely treatment.

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. Golden Thousand Days programme has become more effective this year in Rautahat district after District Coordination Committee started monitoring the project.

The government has developed Total Sanitation Guideline, which recognises sanitation as an integral part of nation-building. The guideline aims to enhance capacity as well as responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders related to education, health, water, nutrition, environment, women, children, climate change and disaster management.

Although malnutrition is easily preventable, it remains a major and unsolved problem in our country. Despite existing plans, 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 awareness among the general people have further intensified the already prevailing problem of malnutrition in Nepal.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Under nutrition is a serious health problem in Nepal. Many children die every year due to malnutrition and related diseases in the

country. Poverty, low levels of food security, lack of education and awareness, superstitions and ignorance are the major causes of malnutrition in Nepal. Due to poverty, many people cannot afford food rich in nutrients. They are also not aware about how to include locally available food sources in their daily diet.

Malnutrition is a major hurdle to the growth and development of a child. Malnourished children are less productive both physically and intellectually than nourished children. Nutrition is crucial for economic as well as social development of a nation. Adequate nutrition is a fundamental right and plays a vital role in the growth and development of the children.

Tackling this problem is a big challenge and requires more integrated and practical approaches. Only the formulation of policies is not enough; proper implementation and monitoring is necessary. There is also a need to strengthen health service delivery for better outputs.

Addressing malnutrition is also vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nutrition programmes need to be merged with livelihood activities which will reduce the extent of child hunger and malnutrition. It also encourages the intake of nutritious food. Nutrition interventions has to be expanded. Efforts needs to be strengthened from both government and

private sectors and interventions should reach the grass root level. It should involve well designed advocacy, social mobilization and behaviour change communication initiatives. It should be done in coordination with various line agencies which will support in making the programme more effective. The public should be equally involved. Focus must be given to increase investment in nutrition sector.

Only the implementation of the programmes and campaigns will not be enough, focus should be made towards reaching the vulnerable communities and informing them. Education plays a vital role.

Improving nutrition for mothers, new-borns and children under five years of age cannot be done alone by the health sector. All the concerned stakeholders like local development, agriculture and education are also responsible. The government must focus towards reducing malnutrition to avoid any effects it does to the individual as well as the nation. ♦

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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