

NUTRITION IN NEPAL



A MONTHLY MEDIA MONITORING REPORT, Ashoj 2074

Issue 11



Cover Photo: Women gathered in a meeting of Mothers group in the district of Aachham to discuss about various child health related issues including hygiene.

Photo: [Naya Patrika](#)

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

HERD conducted this media monitoring to study the efforts made to control and reduce the prevalence of malnutrition by several government and non-government agencies. This media monitoring involves a systematic investigation and analysis of 17 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. Through the media monitoring study, HERD 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.

The latest [Global Hunger Index \(GHI\) report](#) showed that Nepal has made significant progress in reducing hunger and is well ahead of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, but trails behind Sri Lanka on the hunger index among South Asian countries. Steps are being taken to improve the scenario of nutrition in the country. The newly elected members are aware about the importance of a healthy society. The government has been making necessary laws and it is important to ensure that it is implemented properly. Transparency has to be ensured and a strong monitoring body has to be formed. The funds provided should be used in a proper way. There is a need to ensure international standards in food products. The government needs to bring laws so that the pharmacies and hospitals cannot sell any product without approval from concerned authorities. These small steps can ensure in development of a strong future.

Introduction

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).

This figure indicates that nutrition and food security is one of the top challenges for Nepal. These are also a top priority of the Government of Nepal. Nutrition has been identified as one of the important agendas of national development. Commitments from various national and international partners have been made to tackle the scenario. The government and non-government organisations have focused on various programmes related to maternal and child health. Investments in the sector have increased. Various facilities have been introduced to encourage institutional delivery. Female Community Health Workers have been mobilised which has provided special support in reaching the unreached areas. Nevertheless, even after many efforts, Nepal has noted very little progress in the sector.

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 has insights on how external development partners, NGOs, business and other relevant stakeholders that are engaged in nutrition in Nepal.

Methodology

This media monitoring study was conducted for the period of one month from 17th September to 17th October (covering the Nepali month of Ashoj 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 17 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

Malnutrition among children is prevalent in [Makawanpur district](#). According to District Public Health Office, more than 3,000 children in the district are suffering from malnutrition. Of them, 768 children are suffering from severe malnutrition.

The DPHO, in coordination with various NGOs, is treating malnourished children through 39 health facilities. According to the DPHO, 227 children who are suffering from severe malnutrition have not been able to get proper treatment until now.

According to the news published in Rastriya Samachar Samitee (National News Agency), more than 1800 children of Nuwakot are found to be suffering from malnutrition. According to DHO in Nuwakot, 305 children are found to be suffering from severe malnutrition while 1556 are found to be suffering from moderate malnutrition. As per the field study conducted by the DHO in collaboration with various working organizations, nutrition officer, Janardan Silwal states that number of severe malnutrition cases are 1861 in the district.

Within 29 months after the earthquake, 305 cases of severe malnutrition have been found and treatment has been done in the outpatient service center at the health facilities. He added that those who have reached at a critical risk, are being treated under the direct observation of doctors at the district hospital.

After many cases of malnutrition was found in the district, the DHO has established one center (outpatient service center) in local level and has started providing free treatment to patients. According to the data collected in the district, there are around 26 thousand under 5 children and among them, more than 800 children were seen to be suffering from malnutrition.

Immunization Officer Amrit Maharjan informed that there have been efforts done to decrease malnutrition like training to health workers and FCHVs for identification of cases through MUAC measurement, in collaboration with ACF International.

This situation has occurred as children are deprived of exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months. Lack of balanced diet has also added to the problem. If parents are more aware about these aspects then only the children can be saved from malnutrition.

The latest [Global Hunger Index \(GHI\) report](#) showed that Nepal has made significant progress in reducing hunger and is well ahead of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan,

but trails behind Sri Lanka on the hunger index among South Asian countries. However, Nepal's hunger status remains classified as "serious". The 2014 list prepared by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) placed Nepal in the 44th position out of 76 countries with a score of 16.4 in the GHI. Nepal was placed in the 49th spot in 2013, up from the 60th position in 2012.

The GHI report shows that Nepal's hunger status has decreased by 42.25 percent in the last two and a half decade.

Nepal has been ranked 72nd out of 119 countries on the GHI. Among South Asian countries, Nepal is ahead of Sri Lanka (84th), Bangladesh (90th), India (97th), Pakistan (107th) and Afghanistan (111th).

In Nepal's context, the GHI report shows 16 percent of the population to be undernourished, 29.1 percent of under-five children to be underweight and 4.2 percent of them dying before they reach five years of age.

The report said that Nepal's remarkable achievement in reducing child stunting between 2001 and 2011 is associated with, and likely attributable to, increased household assets, increased maternal education levels, improved sanitation levels, and implementation and utilization of health and nutrition programmes, including antenatal and neonatal care

Issues

According to the news published in [The Himalayan Times](#), Gauri Shankar Rural Municipality, Dolakha has stalled the USAID-funded Suaahara Nutrition Project from carrying out its activities in Ward No 4 of the rural municipality for its covert operation. Suaahara has long been working in the district in the field of nutrition and health.

Chairperson of the ward, Prahlad Karki accused the project of promoting irregularities and said "They were asked to submit all the details related to policy, programmes and estimated budget before carrying on with their work, but they ignored our calls and tried to influence us unduly through different channels. Hence, we had to stall the project". He further informed that the district coordination committee had been informed about the ward's decision.

"We took a decision to this effect from a ward-level meeting. A letter citing the decision has also been registered with the DCC," Karki informed, vowing not to entertain any non-government organisation, as long as they don't maintain transparency while executing their programmes.

Suaahara Project district coordinator Arjun Aryal, however, disavowed any knowledge of the decision taken by the ward. "We have a local partner organisation and it hasn't

informed us about the ward's decision," Aryal said.

The news published in [Kantipur Daily](#) has pointed that pharmacies have been openly advertising and selling milk substitute products against the rules. According to Nepal Breast milk substitute Act 1992 and regulation 1994, promotion, advertisement and open sales of such substitutes is not allowed.

On September 20, 2017 Lagankhel's Maya Sapkota visited a doctor when she had problem breastfeeding her newly born baby. The doctor in the government hospital suggested her to feed "formula" milk to the baby. She thought it is okay to feed her baby the packaged milk and went to a private pharmacy to buy farex (powder milk). She was shown varieties of milk powder and she bought a packet worth Rs 1000. Neither she took any suggestion regarding Farex, nor the person in the pharmacy informed her anything.

According to nutritionist Dr. Aruna Uprety, "the lawbreakers have not been punished due to the weak implementation despite **strong law**". She informed that such substitutes only harms the babies and have no any benefit. These only fill the babies stomach but have no nutritional value. And the nutritional labels shown in such substitutes are all fake.

The news published in [Naya Patrika](#) has shown that lately, pregnant women's of Achham have become more aware and interested about providing proper care to their babies. After mothers group started having monthly discussions on health and hygiene, mothers have become more **conscious**. Mothers who didn't even know that pregnant women and the child needs to get vaccinated have started taking their children for immunization and check-up.

The people in the society earlier had a mind-set that pregnant and lactating mothers should not have milk, curd, green leafy vegetables, fruits, meat and eggs. They believed that if the lactating mother had oily food then the child will be sick. This mind-set has been decreasing slowly.

There has been improvement in maternal and neonatal health after the government conducted various programs for maternal and neonatal health. The number of mother and **children's** death has been decreasing. According to DPHO Achham in the Fiscal Year 2072/73, 13 mothers and 13 new born babies had to lose their lives. DPHO chief, Jhanak Dhungana informed that increased awareness among mothers on regular ANC, institutional delivery and immunization along with hygiene have caused decrease in the maternal and neonatal deaths. Along with government's programs for health, the Multi Sector Nutrition Plan, Golden Thousand Days' communication campaign and different

programs conducted by various NGOs have also helped in increased awareness.

According to the news published in [Nepali Times](#) Nepal is blessed with an ideal climate range for various types of traditional and new vegetables: these have not been tapped fully. In fact, nutritious traditional greens are being replaced by meat and other items. Although there is growing self-sufficiency, Nepal imports NPR 3 billion worth of vegetables from India every year. We produce 2.8 million tons of vegetables annually of which more than 60% is grown to be sold. It has been noted that the limited production is due to the lack of improved seeds and low investment in research and development of both hybrid and traditional vegetables.

According to an article published in [Kantipur Daily](#) by nutritionist Dr. Aruna Uprety, physical and mental health is improved if nutritious foods like cereal, pulses, rice, vegetables are eaten in good quantity. But since, there is no any business to companies while providing such information in communities, the Health Ministry shows no concern for such local foods. Useless Baal Vita ((micro nutrient powder))and Plumpy'nut (peanut-based paste in a plastic wrapper) are being distributed. The Agriculture Ministry has stored the nutrition book in the ministry itself. Books written about locally available foods have not been able to increase the health

worker's knowledge. Whereas, Ministry of Health motivates health workers to refuse nutritional foods and provide packaged food to malnourished children. There are many foods rich in micronutrient, available abundantly in Nepal but there is no any practice of the information provided by leaflets of Ministry of Agriculture about such foods.

The practice of ignoring staple nutritious foods available in local context and promoting the readily available packets has resulted in the increase in malnutrition cases in the nation.

Efforts made

According to the news published in [Republica](#), the French Government has provided humanitarian aid of 200,000 euros to UNICEF Nepal.

The aid to UNICEF will focus on the management of acute malnutrition in 18 flood-affected districts (Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Udayapur, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Kapilvastu, Dang, Banke and Bardiya) through provision of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) for treatment of severely malnourished children.

According to a joint statement issued the Embassy of France and UNICEF office in

Kathmandu, the severity of acute malnutrition among children in these districts is "critical" or "severe" as per the WHO guidelines on child malnutrition under emergencies. This fact was brought out after an assessment done following the floods. The project will be implemented on September 2017 to February 2018 and will meet the immediate nutritional needs of 3,000 affected children.

In the news published in [News of Nepal](#) people with HIV and those under ART in Dailekh will be provided with allowance to support them to manage a balanced diet. This decision was taken by Athbis municipality considering the fact that these people are physically weak as they need to take ART regularly. On June 28, the elected representatives of Athbis municipality committed to provide nutrition allowance to those who were suffering from HIV.

Ward number 3 of Athbis municipality has allocated 50 thousand rupees for women suffering from HIV. Similarly, in ward 4, one lakh 50 thousand rupees has been allocated as an emergency fund for HIV patients. Municipality has allocated 2 lakh rupees for supporting HIV victims and single women in ward number 7.

According to the news published in [The Himalayan Times](#) the government has started the process to develop guidelines to check the quality of milk in the domestic market.

Following complaints that milk being supplied in the domestic market does not meet international standards, the Ministry of Livestock Development (MoLD) has formed a committee of experts to develop a guideline on the quality of milk.

According to Shyam Prasad Poudyal(spokesperson of MoLD), MoLD will then prepare a draft of the quality guidelines of milk based on the committee's report and endorse it as soon as possible.

MoLD started the process to develop the quality guidelines of milk following the direction from the Agriculture and Water Resources Committee of the Legislature-Parliament on August 6 to ensure that milk supplied in the domestic market meets international standards.

NDA statistics show that more than 4.8 million litres of milk is consumed in the country on a daily basis.

Dairies have said that the demand of milk in the country is on the rise since the last few years after Nepalis started becoming more health conscious. However, they also said that the production of milk has been dwindling for the last few years following the effect of natural calamities like the earthquakes, landslides and floods on livestock farming.

According to the news published in [Kathmandu tribune](#) a meeting of Legislature-

Parliament on October 10 passed the bill related to providing health services through insurance to all the citizens. The Health Insurance scheme comes in accordance with Article 296 (1) of the Constitution.

There is also provision in the bill which says that the government would bear the premium for poor people, completely differently abled, single woman, senior citizens and orphan children.

Families of those going for overseas employment, civil servants, and those working in informal sector have been mandatorily affiliated in the insurance. The people would get free basic health services from primary health institutions once the health insurance act is implemented. The act would also incorporate other specialized health services.

The government has already started health insurance programme from Kailali from April 7, 2016 by constituting Social Health Security Development Committee. The programme has now been expanded in 18 districts.

A five-member family can be a member the programme after paying NPR 2,500 for a year. In return, the family could get treatment service worth NPR 50,000 for the year. Families with more than five members can avail of services worth more than NPR. 10,000 by becoming a member with an additional NPR. 450 per person.

According to the news published in [Kathmandu Tribune](#) a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre has been established in Dadeldhura for the first time. The centre was set up to support to the treatment of malnourished children in the district. The centre was established on the joint efforts of Sub-regional Hospital Dadeldhura and RUDUC with the financial assistance of Nepal Youth Foundation.

The centre will provide nutrient rich food and necessary medicines to the malnourished children and awareness to the guardians of the children.

According to the Sub Regional Hospital, child patient will be admitted at the centre for treatment from 15 to 60 days when necessary. The centre will provide treatment services free of cost.

Discussion

This media monitoring has strengthened the fact that even after attempts from the government and non-government sector, the scenario of malnutrition in Nepal is not satisfactory particularly among women and children below 5 years of age. The nutrition status is poor in many parts of the country especially in the marginalised community. Many mothers and children have been deprived of proper care and nutritious food.

Similar to previous months, very few media coverage on stories related to nutrition has been noted in **this month's study**. The

change in government system, upcoming elections as well as the festival of Dashain can be regarded as a major reason. More news about elections and political parties further planning has covered the newspapers. Media does cover stories related to nutrition in many times but the coverage is not always same. 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. The prevalence of malnourished children in many parts of the country is covered every month. This month the prevalence of malnourished children in Makwanpur and Nuwakot District has been reported. More than 3,000 children in Makwanpur district are suffering from malnutrition. Of them, 768 children are suffering from severe malnutrition. Similarly, 1861 children are malnourished in Nuwakot.

The reason behind the problem is lack of practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Lack of balanced diet has also added to the problem. If parents are more aware about these aspects then only children can be saved from malnutrition. There is a need to strengthen awareness programmes so that **the number of malnourished children doesn't** increase any further.

According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI) report, Nepal has made significant progress

in reducing hunger and is well ahead of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, but trails behind Sri Lanka on the hunger index among South Asian countries. However, Nepal's hunger status remains classified as "serious".

News published in The Himalayan Times showed that Gauri Shankar Rural Municipality, Dolakha has stalled the USAID-funded Suaahara Nutrition Project from carrying out its activities in Ward No 4 of the rural municipality for its covert operation. Suaahara has long been working in the district in the field of nutrition and health.

There is a need to strengthen monitoring system and maintain transparency so that **such scenarios doesn't occur**. Sometimes misunderstanding among various bodies can lead to some harsh decisions but there is a need to collect evidence and also look for the way forward instead of just halting the task.

Pharmacies have been found openly advertising and selling milk substitute products against the rules. Parents have been feeding the substitute to their children without even doing research just because it is available at pharmacies of the hospital. Nutritionist have stressed that these products contains no nutritious values as stated and there is a need to stop its use. There is a need to implement rules properly so that the general public is not robbed by pharmacies and hospitals. In addition, people must be

aware and should be encouraged to do some research about products they feed their children.

Attempts of various bodies have made pregnant women of Achham more aware and interested about providing proper care to their babies. Mothers group have been a platform to discuss about various child health related issues including hygiene. The awareness regarding nutritional diet has been increasing along with proper nutrition intake.

There has been improvement in maternal and neonatal health. The number of mother and child's death has been decreasing. Along with the government's programs for health, the Multi Sector Nutrition Plan, Golden Thousand Days' communication campaign and different programs conducted by various NGOs have also helped in increased awareness.

Although Nepal is blessed with an ideal climate range for various types of traditional and new vegetables: these have not been tapped fully. In fact, nutritious traditional greens are being replaced by meat and other items. Nepal imports billions worth vegetable from India each year. The limited production is due to lack of improved seeds and low investment in research and development of both hybrid and traditional vegetables. There is a need to utilise the resources the country has and increase its

own production which will benefit the health as well as economy of the nation.

There is a lack of business companies which will promote intake of nutritional foods like cereal, pulses, rice, vegetables are eaten in good quantity. An article published in Kantipur daily has suggested that the Health Ministry shows no concern for such local foods and is promoting Baal Vita and Plumpy nut. The Agriculture Ministry has stored the book on nutrition in the ministry itself. These books written about locally available foods were supposed to distributed to health worker.

There is a need to draw the attention of the concerned bodies in such matter because if the informer is not well educated then the public will never benefit with any type of programmes.

Malnutrition in Nepal has not just been a topic of concern for government but also for international donors. Many organizations have been funding to improve the malnutrition situation of different parts of the country.

Newly elected representatives have been focusing in health sector as well. In Dailekh those undertaking ART in Athbis Municipality of Dailekh will be provided with allowance to support them manage a balanced diet.

Government has started the process to develop guidelines to check the quality of milk in domestic market.

A meeting of Legislature-Parliament on October 10 passed the bill related to providing health services through insurance to all the citizens. The Health Insurance scheme comes in accordance with Article 296 (1) of the Constitution.

Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre has been established in Dadeldhura for the first time to support treatment of malnourished children in the district.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The news of poverty, food insecurity, lack of education and awareness, superstitions, ignorance, and these factors contributing to malnutrition are the issues that are normally covered by the Nepali Media. However this month, the Nepali media published few encouraging news and op-ed which will ultimately contribute to improve the situation of nutrition in Nepal. One of those news is related to the bill passed by a meeting of Legislature-Parliament on October 10 related to providing health services through insurance to all the citizens. This insurance policy will contribute to all the aspects of health including nutrition.

The newly elected political bodies have been showing interest in health sector specially nutrition. In Dailekh the PLHIV will be provided with allowance so that they can

manage a nutritional diet. This will not just improve the nutritional status of a certain area but also encourage others to do the same.

Nepal's significant progress in reducing hunger in Global Hunger Index (GHI) and is well ahead of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan is also encouraging news.

Establishment of a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre in Dadeldhura is also encouraging news.

There is also a need to strengthen the monitoring system and maintain transparency while running any type of programmes. This will help find the flaws and improve them so that the budget that can be utilised for a good cause doesn't get wasted.

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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