

NUTRITION IN NEPAL



A MONTHLY
MEDIA MONITORING
REPORT, Magh 2073

Cover Photo: A mother and child from Rolpa district.

Photo: <http://www.onlinekhabar.com/2017/01/530411/>

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

Monthly Media Monitoring Report

On Nutrition



**Health Research and Social
Development Forum**



Magh 2073

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nutrition is important in all process of life starting from fetal development in the uterus, the birth of the child, growth, maturity and old age. Malnutrition has been a serious problem in Nepal and is a major threat particularly to the health of infants, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating mothers. The nutritional status of mothers and children is seemingly very poor particularly in the rural areas of Nepal.

Malnutrition encompasses a multitude of micronutrient deficiencies which affect all aspects of human development and particularly impact maternal mortality, birth outcome, child morbidity and mortality, and childhood development. Low consumption of fruit and fresh vegetables is a major contributing factor for nutritional disorders such as iron and vitamin A. A child's gender, type of residence, family size, family income, maternal education, ethnicity, health services and safe water supply are contributing factors to child malnutrition.

In addition to that, several other factors also contributes to high rates of child malnutrition, ranging from those as fundamental as political instability and slow economic growth, to highly specific ones such as the frequency of infectious diseases and the lack of education. Proper nutritional diet is critical to avoiding disease and remaining healthy in the long run. Meanwhile, poor nutrition contributes to reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to diseases,

impaired physical and mental development and reduced national productivity. The intensity of the problem is staggering enough to affect the sustainable development goals in Nepal.

This media monitoring was done through a systematic investigation of several print and online media sources, to understand the current nutritional scenario and the actions made to improve the situation. Through this study, we attempted to recognize the current trends and issues related to malnutrition as illustrated by the various media sources. We attempt to capture a valid picture of nutrition in Nepal with respect to the current nutritional situation, nutritional vulnerabilities, issues, efforts and progress made in the Nepal to tackle the problem of malnutrition.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal falls among the countries in the world with the highest prevalence of malnutrition. The [Nepal Demographic and Health Survey](#) (NDHS 2011) revealed that 41% of children below the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting), 29% of the children are underweight and 11% are wasted and 18% of the women are malnourished. Childhood is a time of active growth in terms of physical size, mental, emotional and physiological development and normal growth is dependent upon adequate nutrition and encompasses major transformations from birth to adulthood to old age.

Child malnutrition is caused by a combination of inadequate or inappropriate food intake along with frequent child infections, lack of knowledge of mothers regarding child nutrition, feeding practices, hygiene and sanitation. 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. There are many factors that directly or indirectly cause malnutrition among children like inadequate or inappropriate food intake, childhood diseases and improper care during illness.

Several efforts have been made to improve the nutritional and food security situation in Nepal and has been identified as an important agenda of national development and have been recently accorded as a top priority by Government of Nepal. There has been a strong high level commitment from the government and has been matched with extensive support from the external development partners.

The nutritional status of women and children is particularly important, and needs immediate actions for improvement because it is through women and their off-spring that the wicked effects of malnutrition are transmitted to future generations.

METHODOLOGY

This media monitoring study was carried out for a period of one month from January 14 to February 11, 2017 (covering the stories of Magh 2073 BS). We collected various media stories by conducting daily media monitoring of **19** national mainstream and online sources viz. The Himalayan Times, Republica, The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Nagarik, Rajdhani, Annapurna Post, The Rising Nepal, Gorkhapatra, Nepali Times, Himal Khabarpatrika, Online Khabar, Setopati, Pahilopost Nepal Khabar, RSS News, Dhamaka Daily, Mountain Today and others. We also, conducted random search in the internet with the keyword 'Nutrition' that included stories on nutrition within this period.

An aggregate of **29 media stories** concerning nutrition and food security were included as part of analysis for this study. The stories were then recorded in a spread sheet (Microsoft Excel) detailing the date, title, sources and links to the news stories. We also attempted to identify the popularity and importance of the news articles based on the number of views, shares, comments and the page number in which the news was mentioned.

These articles were then further synthesised and categorised into various themes and sub-themes for the purpose of analysis.

MAJOR FINDINGS

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

CURRENT SCENARIO

Experts have claimed that the scenario of nutrition in the country is much complicated and in comparison to the intensity of the problem, very little priority has been given by the government of Nepal. The situation of nutrition is poor in Nepal particularly among the poor and marginalized communities.

According to news reports, most children are malnourished due to lack of proper food in villages of Baitadi. In ward number 7, 8 and 9 of Chaukham, more than 10 children have been reported to be malnourished. Due to the poor economic condition, mothers work all day in the fields and leave their children at home with roti and left over rice, due to which the children do not get the required nutrition for their growth and development. Due to lack of awareness and severe poverty in the district, the situation of nutrition is worrying. Additionally, pregnant women are deprived of nutritious food and timely follow up to health facilities making the situation dire. People in the district are currently facing problems to manage two meals per day according to the news report published in Nagarik Daily.

Furthermore, in the district, women giving birth to children at a young age has been found to be the major reason of birth of malnourished children. The main reason behind this can be attributed to the lack of balanced diet among young pregnant women under the age of 20. In Baitadi, almost 43% of women marry before the age of 20 and this trend does

not show any sign of slowing down. In between Ashar and Poush a total of 980 births have been given by women under the age of 20 according to a news report.

A 14 year old girl (Bina Dhami) who had been suffering from severe malnutrition [died in Baitadi District](#). She weighed only 5.5 kilos before she died. She was diagnosed with severe malnutrition during a health check-up at Chaukham Health Post two months ago and was referred to malnutrition treatment center in Khodpe Health Post and was further referred to nutrition rehabilitation center in Dadeldhura. Bina's father, Amar, said he couldn't complete the treatment of his daughter because he ran out of money. She was instead being treated at home by a Shaman who visited occasionally. Patients suffering from severe malnutrition are provided free of cost treatment in Dhangadi but many parents are unable to take their children to Dhangadi as they cannot afford the travel fare.

In the last three months, 1408 malnourished children have been identified in Bajura. When taken to the district health post for Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition programme, 955 children who were in the middle stage were asked to wait until the child reaches the [severe stage for treatment](#). The marginalised people have complained that even after identification of the disease they have to wait for the illness to become severe in order to get the treatment facility.



Picture: a health worker examines a child suffering from malnutrition in Martadi, Bajura.

Source: The Himalayan Times, February 11, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/nutrition-drive-yielding-results-ramechhap-vdcs/>

In the year 2072/73, of the 18,810 children under 2 years of age, 806 were found to be [malnourished in Kalaiya](#) of Bardiya district. Lack of education, awareness and poverty has been regarded as the main reason behind this. Additionally, the food items produced are also not being consumed in a balanced and healthy way. Meanwhile, 78% of the children in Jajarkot have been identified to be [stunted](#). According to the government statistics 41% children have the problem of stunting in Nepal, but compared to that the problem is double in Jajarkot.



Picture: Malnourished Children from Kalaiya, Bardiya **Source:** Rajdhani Daily, January 22 <http://rajdhanidaily.com/2017/01/22/33775/>

Seventeen years old Shambhu Ram lost his life due to malnutrition last month and the number of malnourished children in various VDCs of [Saptari](#) has been increasing in recent times. The government statistics have pointed that the situation of Saptari is vulnerable subtle in comparison to other districts of the country. According to the District Health Office, Saptari, a total of 62,170 children are suffering from malnutrition of which 9834 have severe malnutrition. The main reason for the problem is stated as poverty, lack of nutritious food and awareness Regarding the problem.



Picture: Malnourished Children from Saptari, **Source:** Nagarik, January 29 <http://www.nagariknews.com/news/11582>

The situation is worse in [Karnali](#) where the **people have to travel for 2 days to reach the health facility**. Jagge Nepali, father of Pawan Nepali who was suffering from severe malnutrition, treated his son with the traditional healers and also sacrificed animals in temples. When his son's condition became worse he took him to the health facility where he learned his

son was suffering from severe malnutrition. Similar, scenario is seen in many families in the region. Lack of health facilities and delay in reaching the nearest health facility has worsened the scenario of malnutrition in Karnali. Furthermore, every house in Karnali has at least one member suffering from malnutrition. This is a huge challenge for the country which has targeted to eliminate malnutrition by 2025.



Picture: 5 years old Pawan Nepali who died on 18 Mangsir, **Source:** Himal Khabar, February 5 <http://himalkhabar.com/news/2057>

In Humla 64% children are stunted and more than 70% are wasted. Similarly, recent surveys have shown that 54.57% children are malnourished in Kalikot. In Mugu of the 2069 children 1015 are malnourished. Lack of food is the main cause of malnutrition followed by poverty in Karnali. Most of the people from the area are known to eat only rice and lentils provided by the government and found not consuming green vegetables, according to the news report by Mountain Today.

Malnutrition is supposed to be common among kids from poor families but this is not always the case. **Due to lack of**

awareness on what and how to feed children, many parents even from rich families unknowingly make young children victims of malnutrition. The case studies from Jhapa has suggested that only providing food is not enough and focus needs to be oriented towards providing nutritional needs of the children rather than just merely eating.

In Bajhang district, people have started to register their marriages and birth of their children only after the government had announced to provide nutrition allowance to the children below five years of age. The government has announced to implement a nutrition allowance programme for all the children below five years of age in Bajhang, Achham and Rautahat districts which was previously provided only to Dalit children.

ISSUES

Lack of awareness and severe poverty has resulted in the health of the children in Baitadi. Lack of proper health facilities during pregnancy has also added up in the problem. Early marriage and lack of balanced diet has resulted in the birth of malnourished children. Lack of nutritious food has made pregnant, postnatal women and children vulnerable to malnutrition in Bajura. When the disease is identified among the children they have to wait until the problem becomes severe for treatment. This has created fear among the parents.

In the article written by Bhairab Raj Kaini published in Republica agriculture is the

only source of food and nutrition for the majority of the Nepalis especially for the poor. But policymakers and agriculturists in Nepal have traditionally had little impact on [nutritional outcomes](#). Child health specialist Dr. Karna Sapkota stated that even educated parents fail to ensure good health of their children. Inadequate knowledge over health and nutrition leads to fatal consequences.

The situation in Karnali is pitiful. Due to the existing poverty and geographical situation in the region, people largely depend upon traditional healers for treatment. They tend to believe in sacrificing animals to impress the gods so that they are cured. This leads to delay in reaching the health facility claiming numerous lives.

EFFORTS MADE

A two-day National Nutrition Symposium had been organized in Pokhara on January 12 and 13 (Poush 28 and 29) where a ten point commitment was made by the concerned bodies including the Ministry of Health. The Health Ministry has committed to run an integrated programme for treatment and management in Mid Terai and Karnali region which is adversely affected by nutrition and food insecurity. Health Minister Gagan Thapa also committed to [prioritise nutrition](#) in the upcoming budget and make strategies to combat the problem. The officials also stated that from the forthcoming year a separate budget code will be developed for nutrition, more sources will be deployed

and the programmes related to nutrition will be prioritized.

The government is expanding its [child nutrition grants](#) in three more districts where majority of the population lives below the poverty line. The Department of Civil registration under the Ministry of federal Affairs and Local Development is working to provide the monthly child nutrition allowance in Achham, Bajhang and Rautahat within this month. The scheme promise to provide Rupees 400 per month to poverty-stricken children below five years of age. The programme is being expanded after seven years after it was first introduced in 2009/10 as part of implementing social protection policies aimed at improving the nutritional status of children under the age of 5. The programme is to be executed by mid-February, which would benefit almost 84,000 children of the targeted districts of them 60,000 will be from Rautahat.

In the health facilities of Martadi, Tadhe, Dogadi, Koldi, Rugani and Gotri VDC of Bajura, the treatment for malnutrition has been started. It has been supported by Integrated Rural Health Development Training Centre Nepal, according to the news published in Himal Khabar.

As part of support to implementation of Multi Sector Nutrition Plan, [District level Orientation Meeting](#) was held in Dailekh where officials from national to district level discussed about the current scenario. The participants highlighted on the need of nutritious food of pregnant women which helps in the birth of the healthy baby. What can be done to

minimize the number of children suffering from malnutrition was focused in the meeting.



Picture: District level orientation regarding MSNP

Source: Dhamaka Daily, February 8
<http://dhamakadaily.com/news/?p=19347>

Furthermore, Sarangdada VDC of Panchthar has been declared a [child friendly VDC](#). This is the sixth child friendly VDC of the country, second of Eastern Development region and first from Mechi zone. Now all the programmes as well as the budget will be focused considering the necessity of the children in the VDC.

DISCUSSIONS

Findings from this media monitoring study demonstrates that the nutritional status in many parts of Nepal is poor despite many efforts made and activities conducted on its behalf. Despite some progress, it is deemed insufficient to anticipate the intensity of the problem of Nutrition in Nepal. In the villages of Baitadi, Bardiya, Bara, Humla, Mugu, Karnali, Panchthar, Jajarkot, Rautahat and Bajura the impact of malnutrition is

maximum with the problem affecting most people in the area.

Lack of timely and valuable information has been adding to the misery of the problem. Most of the people who are directly or indirectly victims of malnutrition are greatly unaware regarding the reason and solutions to the problem. Belief in traditional healers and shamans is still prevalent in many parts of the country and is also a contributing factor for low help seeking attitude particularly among the people from vulnerable groups in Baitadi and Karnali People prefer seeing a nearby traditional healer rather than walk for days to the nearby health facility. Also due to lack of awareness and proper support most women are getting married and giving birth before the age of 20 in Baitadi and this issue needs immediate and careful attention.



Picture: Malnourished Children in Bara, **Source:** Online Khabar, January 22,
<http://nepalkhabar.com/np/news/community/91571>

Despite many interventions designed and implemented by the government along with several other organizations

have not been able to reach the grass root level of the communities and the people who need help the most are still being deprived of support and treatment. This is particularly true in case of Baitadi, Bajura, Humla, Mugu, Karnali, Panchthar, Jajarkot, Accham, Bajhang and Rautahat.

Many children are still known to be dying due to lack of timely treatment. Even for the ones who seek timely treatment from the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) programme, have not been provided any help until the case is severe and people particularly from poor socio-economic background are having to wait for the condition to worsen before they get the much required medical attention.

The quality of agricultural products have not been up to the mark. The focus of the agriculture sector has been on increasing the quantity and availability of agricultural products rather than on its quality. In addition to this, unhealthy food habits also contribute in making the problem wicked. People lack awareness on what, when and how to eat. Even children from rich economic background in Jhapa are apparently known to be suffering from malnutrition not due to lack of food but due to lack of information on maintaining a healthy and nutritious diet.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Malnutrition remains a serious barrier to a child's survival, growth and development in Nepal. Children who suffer from malnutrition are found to be physically and intellectually less productive compared to normal children. Malnutrition elucidates a vicious cycle, transferable among generations and is a serious public health concern in Nepal.

Nutrition related interventions need to be combined with livelihood activities to reduce the extent of child hunger and malnutrition in Nepal. In schools, teachers and health workers need to be trained on health and nutrition. Despite the policies formulated by the government, the level of impact has been very minimal and the intensity of the problem is still severe. In order to reduce malnutrition throughout the country, it is necessary to introduce a broader package of nutrition interventions. The government should ensure that the interventions designed should reach the grass root levels in the community where the problem is most resolute. The different government and non-government agencies should work in coordination to make the influence of the interventions more effective. The delivery of the interventions should be done through community based programming facilitated by FCHVs. Further improvements are needed in terms of delivery of the safe motherhood programme in Nepal. Iron-folic acid supplementation for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers is also vital in prevention and control of malnutrition.

In Nepal, seasonal food shortages is a major is a major contributing factor for malnutrition. Food security is one of the most important factors that need reconsideration for preventing malnutrition in the long run. In the 28 districts, provisions to ensure food security is needed as lack of food is the major reason behind malnutrition in these districts. The role of agriculture to improve the quantity and quality of diets has been overlooked by policy makers and agriculturalists in Nepal. The government needs to encourage the agricultural production in order to reduce poverty and food scarcity. There are multiple ways in which agriculture can influence nutritional outcomes. The most direct way is through production of nutritious foods for household consumption. The second is through increased household income through sale of food produced or through wages from farm labour. Third way is through agricultural policies that affect food practices. A fourth way concerns how income obtained from agricultural production or labor is spent. By investing in nutrition-sensitive agricultural programs, there can be sustained impact on health and productivity of families. Diversified agricultural production improves access to diversified and nutritious foods. Training and support needs to be provided to local farmers along with additional technical support for raising the standards of the agricultural products.

In addition to this, better communication mechanisms needs to be instilled in

order to create a proper and effective two way communication links between the central level and the VDCs. This would help in raising the level of awareness among the communities and would help in dissemination of much needed lifesaving information to the victims and the communities. There is a need to plan strategies and preventive public policies based on regional situation to alleviate malnutrition and reach the affected communities as early as possible. Collective effort of all stakeholders with proper coordination and communication mechanisms at all levels is needed to tackle the problem of malnutrition in Nepal.



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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Regd. No.323/061.062
SWC No: 17306
PAN: 301789316