

NUTRITION IN NEPAL

A MONTHLY MEDIA MONITORING REPORT, Baisakh 2074



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Study Team

Dr Sushil Baral
Rajesh Ghimire
Sudeep Uprety
Kritagya Regmi
Bipul Lamichhane

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The problem of malnutrition in Nepal is severe and far reaching affecting millions of children and infants. It is a serious problem in Nepal, as in other South Asian countries, and is a major threat to the health of infants, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating mothers. The nutritional status of mothers and children under five years of age are extremely poor in Nepal. Nutrition is vital throughout the life time of an individual, starting from fetal development in the uterus, the birth of the child, growth, maturity and old age. Without proper nutrition, the loss of life chances of an individual is immense and will also affect the economic growth and development of a nation. One estimation of the [World Bank](#) shows that malnutrition decreases the Gross Domestic Product of a country by 3 to 7 percent.

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. Malnutrition is a silent killer and is largely under reported, under addressed and under prioritized problem in Nepal. Malnutrition and disease work in a deadly cycle i.e. a malnourished child is more likely to suffer from disease and the more they suffer from disease they are more likely to be malnourished. Nutrition plays a vital role in not only the physical growth of children, but also hampers their mental and cognitive growth especially within the first 1000 days of their life.

Inadequate food intake leads to weight loss and a weakened immune system, which means that childhood disease will be more severe and will last longer. The low consumption of fruit and fresh vegetables,

among children and women in Nepal is resulting in nutritional disorders such as deficiencies in iron and vitamin A.

According to the latest [Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016](#) findings, nutritional status of children in Nepal is as such: **36% stunting, 10% wasting and 27% underweight.**

The root cause of malnutrition among children and women in Nepal include poverty, political instabilities and harsh ecological structure. Other underlying causes could be diversified diet, lack of education and disparities in the use of health services. Similarly child under nutrition results from maternal under nutrition, which is the result of early child bearing.

Furthermore, 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 Nepal.

This study was conducted through a systematic investigation and analysis of 16 print and online media sources; to identify the current scenario of nutrition in Nepal and the current activities along with efforts that have been made to control and reduce the level of prevalence of malnutrition by several private and public agencies. We sought to recognize the current trends and issues associated with nutrition as illustrated by the media sources. We attempted 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 in Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition refers to inadequate intake of protein, calories, iron and other vital nutrients. If the body does not receive the energy it needs in the form of food,

malnutrition will occur. Children with malnutrition have inadequate fats storage and their bones are prominent. Malnourished children have impaired brain development and these children have high incidence of disease because their body cannot fight off infections. Malnutrition has contributed in high death rates among children in Nepal. Children who are severely malnourished typically experience slow behavioral and intellectual development, which may need to intellectual disabilities. Even when treated, under nutrition may have long term effects in children, with impairments in mental function and digestive problems persisting throughout their life-time.

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 has been recently accorded as a top priority by the government of Nepal. There has been a strong commitment from the central level to tackle the problem of malnutrition in the country. Also extensive support have been received from various donors and external development partners. However, despite a multitude of activities ongoing in various parts of Nepal very little noticeable progress has been made as of yet.

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

This media monitoring study involved tracking down of relevant media stories with respect to nutrition and food security in order to identify the current state of malnutrition and the attempts that are

being made to improve the current state of malnutrition and the activities/works that are being done to improve the situation of nutrition in Nepal. We aimed to take a closer look on the context of nutrition in Nepal and to track down nutritional campaigns, identify trends, discover the prevalence level, to understand how aid agencies and donors are engaged in it, and to understand how media and other agencies are responding to it. This study also attempts to draw attention of concerned authorities and researcher, to explore further and acquire more information regarding the nature and extent of problem which can be helpful in revising the current approaches and in achieving the goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition in Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

This media monitoring study was conducted for the period of one month from April 14 to May 14 (Baisakh 2074). We collected various stories by conducting daily media monitoring of national mainstream and online sources namely: Rastriya Samachar Samiti, The Himalayan Times, Republica, The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Rajdhani, Annapurna Post, The Rising Nepal, Gorkhapatra, Nepali Times, Himal Khabar, Online Khabar, Setopati, Pahilopost and Nepal Khabar. In addition to it random search was also carries out in the internet with the key words 'nutrition' and 'food security'. A news story on nutrition was also reported from a daily of Parsa district, Sarwa Rastriya Dainik.

We managed to gather a total of **16 media stories related to nutrition**. The collected stories were recorded in a spread sheet i.e. Microsoft Excel detailing the date, title, sources and links to the story. This study involved a three step process i.e. information finding, information recording

and analysis. The 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 categorized into the following categories; Current Scenario, and Efforts Made

CURRENT SCENARIO

According to a news report by [The Kathmandu Post](#), a 10 month old infant girl named Nirusha Hamal of Kalikot died during her treatment at the District Hospital. Nirusha was admitted to the hospital on the referral of Sunya Health Post. She was reported to weigh only 5 kilograms and had been suffering from fever when she was admitted to the hospital. Her parents, Dil Bahadur and Kalpana are known to live as daily wage workers in India. According to her father Dil Bahadur, they had started feeding her packed milk since she was 3 months old as breastfeeding alone was not enough and despite their attempts to keep her healthy, she continued to grow frail. Health officials claim that, Nirusha's life could have been saved if her parents had brought her to the hospital in time and the girl's parents did not consider seeking medical help until the last hour.

Likewise, in November 2016, 14 months old Sushila Yogi and 1 year old Kopila Pharsal had also died of malnutrition. This is the third malnutrition related death reported in the space of 6 months in Kalikot. According to Katak Bahadur Mahat, the nutrition chief at the District Health Office, 573 children have been diagnosed with severe malnutrition in the within the last 9 months. Among them, 277 children have recovered following the

treatment while the conditions of remaining children are unknown as their parents have discontinued the treatment.



Picture: [Mothers Visit the Manma-based district hospital with their undernourished children in Kalikot](#)

According to a news report in [Kantipur](#), two children, Charita Dhama (10 years old) and Shrawan Rokaya (1.5 years old) have already died of malnutrition in Bajura, and the situation of malnutrition is awful in the district. The news report states findings of a survey conducted among children below five years of age in Bajura, where the girls were found to be the most affected. Among the 13684 children surveyed, 2139 were found to be malnourished and among them 1143 were girls and 853 were boys. Among these girls, 640 were found to be severely malnourished and 450 were mildly malnourished. This high prevalence of malnutrition in girls could be attributed to the discrimination among the girls and boys that exist in Nepal.



Picture: [Dhan Laxmi Pandey from Bajura with her 1 and half year old malnourished son](#)

According to a news report in [Online Patrika](#), 9 years old Rakki Sunar is never allowed outside her home. Her parents have been keeping her indoors since she was 2 years old as she is mentally ill. Rakki is from a poor family who generate their income from selling firewood and cannot spend money on Rakki's treatment. She is severely malnourished and has been deprived of proper food and care since she was very young. She now has shrunken eyes and her arms and legs are also very slender. Her life is in danger if she does not receive immediate treatment. Her parents are looking for a funder who will pay for her treatment as they are well aware of the consequences of not seeking timely treatment. They are currently in search of support and donations.

In another news story presented by [Kantipur](#), Dinesh Das and Mamata Devi's daughter Jiwachi from Saptari is severely malnourished. She is very thin and her bones can be seen through her skin. She had been deprived of proper care and nutritious food since she was very young. After she was in danger of losing her life, her parents took her to Gajendra Narayan Singh Sagarmatha Zonal Hospital, for receiving treatment from its rehabilitation center. According to

Rushmi Jha (the Chief of the Rehabilitation Centre), the situation of the girl is worrying and among all the children who have ever come the centre, this is the most severe case of malnutrition so far. According to Jiwachi's parents she was healthy during her birth but had slowly started losing weight after she was 2 years old. She is the fourth daughter of Dinesh and Mamata, and all her siblings had died during birth. Her father had gone to Malaysia to earn money for Jiwachi's treatment and her mother had taken her to various hospitals, however did not get treated. Six months before, 13 months old Nilkumari Manda was also admitted to the rehabilitation center and was successfully sent home after treatment. Due to illiteracy, poverty and lack of awareness many children in Saptari have become victims of malnutrition.



Picture: [4 and half years old, severely malnourished Jiwachi Das with her mother](#)

EFFORTS MADE

According to a news report in RSS, Lumbini Zonal Hospital has been serving as home to marginalised and malnourished people. With the support of Child Health Division and Nepal Youth Foundation, the zonal hospital has been providing nutritional support to the

malnourished children. They have been admitting children below the age of 14 in their nutritional rehabilitation home to provide them with the required care and support to overcome malnutrition and live a healthy life. According to the news report, 7 children are currently being treated at the rehabilitation centre. In addition to that, the centre also been providing important nutrition related information to mothers and young women. They also have the provision of admitting malnourished mothers along with their children. Within the last 3 years, 251 children have been successfully treated and sent home by the rehabilitation centre at the hospital.

According to a news published in [MyRepublica](#), the government is preparing to make it compulsory for orphanages and child rehabilitation centers to buy health insurance for all children they provide shelter to. The government has made a proposal along these lines in the Health Insurance Bill 2017 that was tabled in parliament by the Ministry of Health. This bill also makes it mandatory for guardians to buy health insurance for infants, children, the elderly and the disabled.

According to local national daily newspaper from Parsa, Sarwa Rastriya Dainik, among the 21 Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (MSNP) VDCs, 5 have been selected as model VDC in Parsa and a two day advocacy workshop had been held for it. The District Coordination Committee of Parsa had organized the 2 day advocacy workshop which highlighted the importance of MSNP, MSNP implementation plan, shared knowledge on intergenerational malnutrition cycle and daily dietary intake and its importance. In the advocacy workshop. A future plan was also developed for improving the nutritional status of women and children in the selected VDCs.

In order to control and prevent the growing problem of malnutrition in [Bajura](#), many government and non-government agencies have been working in the district. Suaahara and MSNP have also been implemented in the district.

According to a news mentioned in [News of Nepal](#), CPN UML political party in their election manifesto have plead to make all the villages and towns of Nepal free of malnutrition within 5 years if they win the election. They have also stated that no one will have to die due to lack of health services, vaccines or malnutrition in the future. They have also plead to end the practice of child marriage from Nepal which is one major contributing factor for high malnutrition prevalence and high maternal/child mortality in the country.

According to [The Kathmandu Post](#), wheat production is expected to increase in Parsa despite the hailstorm that hit the crops and is expecting to see a wheat harvest of 78,000 tons this season according to the District Agriculture Development Office. Had it not been hit by the hailstorm the production would have been much higher. Likewise, in another news report, [The Kathmandu Post](#) claims that, Rupandehi have witnessed a surge in production of wheat due to favorable weather conditions from the monsoon season and widespread availability of fertilizers in the district. According to the District Agriculture Development Office, Rupandehi saw a surge in production of wheat by 3,969 tons compared to the previous year. Around 80% of the wheat produced in the district is consumed within the district and over 40,000 people in Rupandehi are involved in wheat farming according to the news report.

According to an article published in [Kantipur](#), today there are over 50 Peace

Corps Volunteers working in Nepal that focus on improving the food security of rural small-holding farm families. In the previous year, they had collaborated with the members of adopted communities to train 1,739 farmers on fruit and nut tree propagation and had worked with 640 farmers to implement highly productive organic gardens, and had instructed 1,189 farmers on soil conservation and improvement methods.

According to a news report in [Dainik Nepal](#), a six-day training concerning maternal and child nutrition is planned to be held in Bajura in order to improve the nutritional situation in the district. All health workers, nutrition stakeholders and female community health workers will be participating in the training. This training was held in support of Suaahara programme under USAID by the district health office. This training will be held in 3 phases in 3 areas of the district which will accommodate 290 participants according to the news report. Likewise, according to RSS, a one day orientation was provided to nutrition stakeholders on the importance of MSNP was held in Jumla participated by District Coordination committee, Ward Secretary, social mobilisers and other stakeholders.



Picture: [Revitalisation training on nutrition in Bajura](#)

DISCUSSIONS

Our media monitoring study reinforces the fact that the situation of malnutrition in Nepal is tragic particularly among the women and children below 5 years of age. The nutritional status in many parts of Nepal is poor despite many efforts made and activities conducted on its behalf.

We have noticed from our previous media monitoring studies that when children die of malnutrition, it receives a lot of attention from the media. However, this time about, despite the death of 10 months old Nirusha Hamal, very few media sources have covered the story. Perhaps this is because of the election that was held this month, which gained all the media attention. The reports of pre-elections campaigns of the political parties and their election manifesto was the major subject of discussion by the media sources. This demonstrates a lack of consistency and seriousness about the widely prevalent malnutrition in Nepal. Also in this month the number of stories concerning nutrition and food security in media sources have drastically gone down in this month.

Higher prevalence of malnutrition in girls than in boys in Bajura could be because of the existing practice of discrimination among boys and girls in Nepal. Boys are always given more priority 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 responsible 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.

Despite improvements in agricultural production in Parsa and Rupandehi, the food security status in Nepal is very poor in most parts of the country as the agricultural products have been of poor quality and low nutritional value. The food security status in Nepal is very poor as the agricultural products have been of poor quality and low nutritional value. In Nepal, more focus is given on increasing the quantity and availability of agricultural products rather than on quality. In Nepal, food shortages is a major contributing factor for such high prevalence of malnutrition. The role of agriculture to improve the quality of diets have been largely overlooked by policy makers and agriculturalists in Nepal.

Despite 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.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Nepal, under nutrition is a serious health problem. Many Nepalese children die every year due to malnutrition and related diseases. Poverty and lack of consciousness are the root cause of malnutrition in Nepal. Many people cannot afford food rich in nutrients due to poverty and they are also not aware to include locally available food sources in their daily diet. Malnutrition is a major hurdle to the growth and development of a child in Nepal. Malnourished children are less productive

both physically and intellectually than other children. Nutrition is crucial for economic as well as social development of a nation. It is clear that the accountability of all stakeholders and an integrated approach is needed to improve the nutritional situation in Nepal. Immediate and effective actions are required both from the government and non-government sector in this regard.

Nutrition programmes need to be merged with livelihood activities to reduce the extent of child hunger and malnutrition in Nepal. 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 of the community. Various line agencies should work in coordination to the interventions more effectively. Moreover, improvements are needed in terms of safe motherhood. Also the iron-folic acid supplementation for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers is also vital in prevention and control of malnutrition.

The government should realise that merely investing in nutritional campaigns will not yield the desired result. It is crucial to bring forth behavioral changes among people, particularly in the rural areas. The government needs to address the underlying causes of malnutrition such as poverty, lack of diversified food, lack of quality healthcare in rural areas and hygiene & sanitation. Education also plays a key role to this end. So investment in education should be made a national priority. Moreover, the government and donor agencies should increase investment in nutrition. They have to assess the situation on the ground more frequently so as to design area-specific programmes and activities in the days ahead.

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.

स्वास्थ्य अनुसन्धान तथा सामाजिक विकास मञ्च
Health Research and
Social Development Forum
www.herd.org.np
email: info@herd.org.np