



Fill the Nutrient Gap

Kyrgyz Republic

Executive Summary



Background

The Kyrgyz Republic is facing a complex challenge in improving nutrition. Despite having made significant gains in prevention of childhood malnutrition in the past decade, impoverished households in the Kyrgyz Republic continue to struggle with basic food and nutrition security. As a result of poor diets, they also face a triple burden of malnutrition with individuals across all socioeconomic groups suffering from micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and non-communicable diseases. It is imperative for human capital development that the Kyrgyz Republic improves diets and nutrition outcomes by focusing on strengthening food systems, making social protection programmes nutrition-sensitive, and improving

coordination across different sectors such as social protection, agriculture, education, and health.

In 2019, the government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the World Food Programme (WFP) conducted a Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) analysis to identify opportunities within the food system to improve access to, and affordability of, nutritious diets. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic and macroeconomic fluctuations have impacted household livelihoods and food prices. Because of these changes and updates to national policies in response to these events, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic and WFP reinitiated the FNG analysis in 2021 to update results on costs and affordability of diets, and to model interventions that could mitigate unaffordability.

Process and methods

The FNG analysis estimated the cost of energy-only and nutrient-adequate (or nutritious) diets, and the percentage of households that, given current food expenditure, would be unable to afford these diets. These indicators were calculated for the four seasons of 2020 for each of the seven oblasts (provinces) in the Kyrgyz Republic, and the two major cities (Bishkek and Osh). The costs of energy-only and nutrient-adequate diets are estimated using the Cost of the Diet linear optimization software.

Diet costs and non-affordability were estimated for a five-person modelled household comprising a breastfed child (12–23 months), a school-aged child (6–7 years), an adolescent girl (14–15 years), a breastfeeding woman, and an adult man. The estimations used retail prices collected by the National Statistical Committee (NSC) of the Kyrgyz Republic and expenditure data from the Kyrgyz Republic Integrated Household Survey (KIHS). The analysis was carried out between October 2021 and October 2022. In November 2022, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic, stakeholders were convened to inform, validate and draw recommendations from the FNG analysis.

Main findings

1. Nutrient-adequate diets cost three times more than diets that meet only energy needs.
2. In 2020, almost all households in the Kyrgyz Republic were able to afford a diet that meets energy needs, but at least two in five households (38 percent) were unable to afford a nutritious diet.
3. Poor diets contribute to all forms of malnutrition in the Kyrgyz Republic. In children, rates of overweight are similar to rates of stunting and consumption of unhealthy foods is prevalent.
4. National social protection programmes are essential to supporting the most vulnerable households if they are to afford nutritious diets. However, without vertical and horizontal expansion, these programmes alone cannot close the affordability gaps.
5. School feeding offers an opportunity to prevent malnutrition in children. Micronutrient intake is improved by school meals that include fortified food items and foods from a diversity of food groups (such as cereals, animal source foods, pulses and vegetables).

6. Women of reproductive age suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity. Micronutrient supplementation can improve nutrient intake which can support good nutrition.
7. Large scale food fortification is an effective mechanism to deliver essential micronutrients through commonly consumed staple foods. Adherence to fortification standards is essential to providing access to fortified foods. Improving national fortification standards within legislation can increase the impact of fortification on nutrition.
8. Bean and fish production has potential to grow. Increasing accessibility to these foods can support consumption and improve access to key micronutrients.
9. Household assistance programmes help households to cover the cost of a nutritious diet. By providing fortified products, in-kind assistance has more potential to cover the cost of a nutritious diet.
10. The impact of cash transfers on dietary quality can be maximized if a household uses the cash to purchase diverse nutritious foods. Social behaviour change (SBC) is needed to encourage households to do so.
11. There is no single solution to improving nutrition outcomes in the Kyrgyz Republic. Combining nutrition-sensitive interventions with social protection and assistance programmes can contribute towards closing affordability gaps.

Recommendations

The FNG stakeholder engagement process led to the development of recommendations that will feed into the Food Security and Nutrition Programme spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic. Based on inputs gathered during the workshops held in November 2022, stakeholders prioritized the following actions:

- **Strengthening capacity of public and private actors across sectors on nutrition integration and healthy diets** through strengthening ministerial capacities on nutrition-sensitive interventions and healthy diets; ensuring handover from development partners to government, building local capacities; developing a platform for sharing nutrition resources (research, data, policy updates) among government and private sector actors; and incentivizing public procurement of nutritious foods.

- **Promoting healthy behaviors** through social behavior change initiatives, development and use of informational materials on healthy diets and practices, introducing nutrition education, and promoting value chains for nutritious foods.
- **Leveraging social assistance to better support nutrition** by enabling households to purchase nutritious foods through vouchers or subsidies, considering the adequacy of current transfers, and advocating for nutrient-adequate in-kind food assistance.
- **Strengthening school feeding programmes** through clearer guidelines and regulation around nutritional content of school meals. This would require advocating for increased government financing, expanding school programmes to additional age groups such as pre-school children and adolescents, promoting fortification in school meals, disincentivizing sale of unhealthy foods to schoolchildren, and strengthening supply chains for procurement of nutritious foods for school meals.
- **Improving national fortification initiatives** through capacity strengthening for local millers, better monitoring of fortification compliance, and advocacy for raising fortification standards to WHO recommendations.
- **Promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture** through realigning government policies for production of nutritious foods, and increasing government support for providing inputs for fruits, vegetables, and legumes and pulses to local producers.



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