



Government of Nepal
**National Planning
Commission**



FNG Nepal

Executive Summary



Introduction

Nepal has made remarkable progress in reducing malnutrition over the past two decades yet one in three children continue to be stunted, high rates of micronutrient deficiencies persist, and new challenges are emerging in overweight, obesity, and diet related non-communicable diseases. Central to preventing all forms of malnutrition are healthy, diverse diets. It is imperative that they are available, accessible, and affordable for all, including the most vulnerable and specific groups across the life cycle such as pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls and children under 2.

In 2020 the government of Nepal undertook a Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) analysis with technical support from WFP, aimed at strengthening the scale up of the second national Multisector Nutrition Plan (MSNP II). The analysis would provide evidence for ongoing and planned programming and develop recommendations for making the implementation of nutrition and food security policy more effective. The FNG analysis used a food systems approach to carry out a situational analysis of the barriers to consuming a nutritious diet among different target groups and contexts in Nepal. The FNG process included a review of existing data

and literature identified by stakeholders, including secondary data on poverty, micronutrient deficiencies, and nutrition indicators; primary research conducted by development organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academia; relevant government reports, conference materials and working papers; and discussions with experts. The process also included an analysis using the Cost of the Diet (CotD) linear optimization tool which enables users to estimate the cost of nutritious diets in given contexts using local market food price data. Based on the results provided by the CotD and household food expenditure data, the FNG analysis estimated the affordability of nutritious diets. Using this information, stakeholders identified interventions for improving access to nutritious foods.

Consultations for the FNG Nepal began in November 2019 and the analysis was launched in May 2020 under the leadership of the National Planning Commission (NPC) with technical assistance from WFP. The main objective of the FNG was to provide evidence to support scale up of programmes developed in Nepal's second Multisector Nutrition Plan, and to identify how different sectors could contribute to improving nutrition outcomes for the most nutritionally vulnerable groups across the life cycle. The FNG process, including design, relied heavily on the knowledge, inputs, and guidance of key stakeholders in Nepal across sectors, including line ministries, NGOs, UN partners, academia and the private sector. The CotD analysis was carried out for a five-person household with individuals representing different stages of the life cycle to achieve a good per capita estimate of the lowest cost nutritious diet. The analysis considered food prices across four distinct seasons and was carried out in 16 distinct geographic areas which are representative of all seven provinces and all three agro-ecological zones (AEZ).

The analysis found that the lowest cost nutritious diet, one that meets energy and micronutrient requirements, is NPR (Nepalese rupee) 348 (USD 2.91) per five-person household per day, while the cost of a diet that meets only energy needs is NPR 141 (USD 1.22). While almost all households in Nepal would be able to afford the lowest cost energy-only diet (between 98 and 99 percent), at least 22 percent would not be able to afford the lowest cost nutritious diet. Non-affordability of the nutritious diet is lowest in the highly urbanized Kathmandu valley, while the highest rates of non-affordability - over 60 percent - are in the remote Mountain areas.

Current consumption patterns indicate that the most often consumed foods across all AEZs are cereal staples, oils and fats, and pulses. To meet nutrient needs, households need to be able to access and afford diverse foods groups, including animal source foods and fresh fruit and vegetables. In Nepal, however, the FNG analysis found that access to nutritious foods is

unequal with lower availability and higher prices in the Mountain areas compared to the rest of the country. For households that purchase most of their food, market access and infrastructure are crucial to ensure access to nutritious foods, as data has shown that road infrastructure lowers food price levels and causes price volatility. Among households with better road access, expenditure on non-staple foods is higher and nutrition outcomes for children under five years are better.

Given the high rates of consumption of cereal crops in Nepal, fortification is a good intervention to improve access to micronutrients that are harder to access through the existing food system. The analysis considered industrial fortification of rice and wheat flour and biofortification of wheat and found that all have potential to significantly impact on reducing the cost of a nutritious diet, hence increasing the likelihood of meeting nutrient needs. For households with access to adequate agricultural inputs such as land and human resources, another pathway to improve access to nutritious fresh foods is through home production. The FNG analysis used data from the Helen Keller International Suaahara project to model the benefits of homestead production of vegetables and poultry through consumption and income generation.

Social protection programmes can also contribute to improving nutrition outcomes by providing households with additional resources to purchase nutritious foods and by linking programmes to nutrition interventions. The FNG analysis found that existing programmes such as the Child Cash Grant only cover a small portion of a household's cost of a nutritious diet. Nepali households would benefit from the expansion of the programme in terms of geographic scope and increased transfer value. The impact of social protection programmes on nutrition can be further increased by using them as a platform to provide specific interventions which target the most nutritionally vulnerable individuals, namely pregnant and breastfeeding women, adolescent girls and young children.

The FNG analysis modelled the potential benefits of WFP's Mother and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) Programme implemented in Karnali Province. Through the provision of fortified blended flours it can fill nutrient gaps for the most vulnerable. The FNG analysis shows how interventions can contribute to the nutrition requirements of targeted individuals. Interventions include the promotion of optimal breastfeeding and nutritious complementary feeding for children aged 6-24 months, micronutrient supplementation for women and adolescent girls, and the provision of specialized nutritious foods for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Given the high rates of school enrolment in Nepal, school feeding programmes provide an excellent platform for improving children's nutrition. With inputs from the Ministry of Education,

Science and Technology and WFP's school-based programming team in Nepal, the FNG analysis assessed the contribution of different school menus on nutrient intake and cost of the diet. It found that the inclusion of fresh nutritious foods such as eggs, milk and vegetables, can fill nutrient gaps left by standard school rations that contain staple cereals and pulses.

There is global consensus and growing evidence that addressing malnutrition requires multisectoral and multistakeholder engagement. The FNG analysis found that the cost of the diet can be substantially reduced when households benefit from interventions by a variety of sectors. The package of interventions increases affordability, making it possible for a greater

proportion of the population to meet their nutrient needs. It is crucial to advocate for each sector to make its contribution towards operationalizing the MSNP II so that households in Nepal can fill their nutrient gaps.

Following the FNG analysis, the NPC and WFP held four thematic workshops: Health, Nutrition and Vulnerable Individuals; Agriculture and Fortification; Education and School Feeding; and Social Protection. Based on the FNG findings, stakeholders identified policy priorities for each sector and developed recommendations for government and development partners. A summary of the recommendations is provided below and a full list of the recommendations is provided in the FNG Nepal final report.

Sector	Recommendations
Cross-Cutting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operationalize the multisectoral nutrition strategy to ensure a more coherent approach across sectors, among different partners, and at different levels of government. This will enable targeting of the most nutritionally vulnerable individuals to maximize impact and efficient use of resources. Strengthen human resource and technical capacity of local-level governments to plan and deliver integrated nutrition programmes across the life cycle. Increase domestic financing for nutrition, strengthen tracking of public expenditure on nutrition, and incentivize private sector investment in nutrition.
Health: Supplementation and specialized nutritious products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase availability and scale up provision of nutritious products such as micronutrient supplements and specialized nutritious foods. Target these at economically vulnerable populations, those suffering from wasting, and nutritionally vulnerable individuals such as pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under two. Improve the quality of implementation of nutrition services delivered by the health sector to increase coverage and effectiveness of existing nutrition interventions.
Agriculture and value chain development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the current revision of the Agriculture Policy takes a food systems approach and is informed by evidence, including FNG results. Promote and enable the cultivation of local nutritious crops and animal source foods, including through scaling up homestead production programmes such as Saaahara, leveraging farmer field schools, and improving linkages with school meals programmes. Strengthen technical capacity and provide resources at local level to deliver effective, inclusive and timely nutrition-sensitive agriculture extension services. Strengthen the value chain of nutritious foods through improvements in market road infrastructure and post-harvest food management
Dietary quality and food safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage healthy food consumption behaviours through effective regulations and governance, and by disincentivizing the production, promotion and retail of unhealthy processed foods. Use social behaviour change strategies to encourage the production and/or purchase and consumption of healthy and nutritious foods, and to address inequitable intra-household food allocation practices. Develop and enforce standards to ensure quality and safety of foods produced and distributed through retail outlets and social safety net programmes.
Fortification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review fortification standards and strengthen regulatory monitoring structures to create an enabling environment for fortification of rice and wheat flour. Provide incentives and training to value chain actors to increase the production and distribution of rice and wheat flour fortified as standard. Incentivize the production and retail/in-kind distribution of fortified foods for specific target groups such as children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women. Expand the biofortification programme to reach customers not covered by post-harvest fortification. Do this by promoting already released biofortified varieties (zinc wheat, lentils), introducing other crops such as vitamin A maize and zinc-enriched maize and rice, and developing a regulatory and monitoring structure.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the nutrient content of school meals and use locally available nutritious foods to stimulate their demand, with benefits to the local economy. Ensure adequate financing for effective implementation of existing plans for school meals programmes, and advocate for increasing geographic scale-up and expanding targeting to include adolescents. Improve standards, policy coordination and governance of food and nutrition at schools at all tiers of government. Use schools as a platform to deliver WASH, health and nutrition services and education to school-age children and adolescents.
Social protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make social protection programmes more nutrition sensitive by reviewing the cash-based transfer size to ensure it is sufficient to contribute to the cost of a nutritious diet, and by using social protection programmes as a platform for delivery of - or link to - other nutrition interventions for specific target groups. Expand geographic coverage of existing social assistance programmes, improve targeting such that households in most need are covered, and ensure programme design (modalities, transfer size) is context-specific. Improve economic access of households to enable them to afford nutritious diets through livelihood programmes targeted towards households in most need.



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