

Achieving Results through Partnerships

Nepal's Scaling-Up Nutrition Initiative Technical Assistance (SUNITA)

HIGHLIGHTS

- The SUNITA trust fund started in 2011 at the suggestion of Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to provide technical support in the form of analytical work, evaluations of interventions and technical assistance to target actions that effectively address gaps in nutrition interventions in Nepal.
- SUNITA complements the South Asia Food and Security Initiative (SAFANSI) trust fund, which was established to address the South Asian Enigma—how chronic malnutrition remains intractable despite high economic growth.
- SUNITA's key contributions and achievements include: the Food and Nutrition Security Thematic Report; a review of the infant and young child feeding program; the implementation of a community-based behavior change for nutrition improvement project; training of social mobilizers and coaches; and the development of district profiles of determinants of food insecurity and malnutrition.



October 2014



WORLD BANK GROUP
South Asia Region

OVERVIEW

Over the past two decades, Nepal has achieved economic growth and improvements in social and health indicators. However, the poor nutritional status of first, women, manifested in a low body mass index, and second, children, seen in low birth weights, underweight, stunting¹ and wasting, has not shown much improvement over this period.

The immediate causes of chronic malnutrition in Nepal include poor feeding and care practices, insufficient nutrient intake, high rate of infection, and teenage pregnancy. Underlying these causes are issues of poverty and food availability, access to safe drinking water, environmental hygiene and sanitation, low literacy, gender inequities and cultural factors that affect household food handling and use.

The inherent complexity of under-nutrition in Nepal, and across South Asia, requires the design and implementation of a **more comprehensive approach to nutrition across multiple sectors**, which involves government officials, civil society, and development partners.

The Nepal's *Scaling-Up Nutrition Initiative Technical Assistance* (SUNITA) fund started at the suggestion of Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to provide technical support in the form of analytical work, evaluations of interventions and technical assistance to target actions that effectively address gaps in nutrition interventions.

SUNITA complements the *South Asia Food and Security Initiative* (SAFANSI) Trust Fund, which was established in 2010 to address the South Asian Enigma —how chronic malnutrition remains intractable despite high economic growth—. The ultimate objective of SAFANSI is to increase the commitment of governments and development partners in pursuing more effective and integrated food and nutrition-related policies and investments.

SUNITA has successfully achieved its objective through key activities such as:



CHALLENGE

Chronic under-nutrition remains in Nepal a critical area in which past development efforts have not made that much of an impact:

- Nepal is among the ten countries in the world with the highest stunting prevalence, and one of the top twenty countries with the largest number of stunted children (UNICEF, 2009). Twelve percent of babies have low birth weight, and under-nutrition contributes to more than one third of child mortality. After two years of age, 41% of pre-school children are found to be stunted (Demographic and Health Surveys - DHS, 2011).
- The consequences of stunting are profound and irreversible, and all too often, the cycle continues for their children. Children who survive under-nutrition are most likely to lead a diminished life due to impaired brain and physical development, and to lowered economic productivity leading to the perpetuation of inter-generational poverty.
- During the last decade maternal micronutrient status has somewhat improved; however, 18 percent of women are still thin or undernourished, and 35 percent are anemic. Almost a quarter of expecting mothers (23 percent) give birth before the age of eighteen, while about half have given birth by age of 20. In terms of both pre-natal and post-natal care, mothers are not provided for as much as they should (DHS, 2011).
- Infant and young child feeding practices are far from optimal. A little less than half (46 percent) of babies are initiated with breastfeeding within one hour

of birth, 70 percent are exclusively breastfed during the first six months, 65 percent are provided with appropriate complementary foods at six months, and only 24 percent of children 6-23 months of age are able to meet the recommended minimum acceptable diet (DHS, 2011).

The Government of Nepal (GoN) has been delivering nutrition interventions as part of its health sector program, some of which have been successful and some which have yet to scale up. The GoN recognizes the need for: 1) a more comprehensive approach to address the direct and underlying causes of under-nutrition in women and children; and 2) technical assistance to overcome some capacity constraints that limit the planning, monitoring and delivering of its nutrition interventions.



APPROACH

In 2009, the Government of Nepal carried-out a Nutrition Assessment and Gap Analysis (NAGA) which identified the need for a multi-sectoral approach and institutional architecture to address the issues of malnutrition in the country.

The NAGA recommended nutritional interventions in the areas of health, agriculture, education, economic activity, gender, social welfare, and finance. Subsequently the GoN, approved the “Multi-sector Nutrition Plan” (MSNP), which involved all the relevant government ministries. The MSNP has not only created the foundation for increased and cross-cutting investment in nutrition across the country, but has also ensured a wide berth for sustained technical stewardship on Food and Nutrition Security issues across a variety of ministries.

With the support from World Food Program (WFP), UNICEF, and the World Bank, a Nutrition Secretariat within the National Planning Commission (NPC) has been established to coordinate the implementation of the MSNP. The Secretariat is also supporting the government with technical assistance for periodic plans, draft policies and facilitated coordination.

In this context, the main focus of the SUNITA trust fund is carrying out analytical work that will enable the relevant government ministries to contribute significantly to improving nutrition indicators in Nepal through the implementation of their sections of the multi-sectoral plan of action. This analysis will complement the support provided by the World Bank through SAFANSI.²



PARTNERSHIPS

SUNITA was launched in 2011, at the suggestion of the Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) with a total contribution of (AUD 1,946,800).

In line with the 2005 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, SUNITA works with Development Partners as well as other organizations to streamline efforts and increase collaborative effectiveness by improving the coordination of Technical Assistance and Technical Support.

Led by the Nepal Nutrition Group, a Technical Assistance/Technical Cooperation matrix and a Draft Joint Technical Assistance Arrangement were agreed upon between the GoN and the Development Partners. All SUNITA activities follow the principles and arrangements described under these two instruments.



RESULTS

All SUNITA activities have successfully been able to support, as envisaged, the development and implementation of the Nepal Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Plan, which is the corner-stone for enabling the country to address the problem of perennial malnutrition. Contributions and achievements of the Plan include:

- **The Food and Nutrition Security Thematic Report** updates the status of Food Security and Nutrition in Nepal, and analyzes key food security trends over the past 15 years. It is based primarily on the findings of the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2010/11, which covered 5,988 households and included anthropometric data collected from approximately 2,500 pre-school children under 60 months (5 years) of age. The report was produced as a joint effort by the National Planning Commission, the Central Bureau of Statistics, WFP, UNICEF, United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), Australia - DFAT, the European Community (EU), and the World Bank, and represents a comprehensive and reliable source of information on the status of national and regional food security and the nutritional status of Nepal's population.
- **A Review of the Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Program** was conducted to assist the GoN in planning future actions to improve child nutrition. Following the recommendations stated in the Nepal Nutrition Evidence Review, conducted by the World Bank in 2011, fragmented Infant and Young Child Feeding practices in different parts of the country were identified, and the need for a comprehensive IYCF

program was confirmed, with a view to developing a set of practical, action-oriented and specific recommendations for improving the quality of IYCF-related interventions in Nepal.

- **The Community-based Behavior Change for Nutrition Improvement Project** provided support to the Sunaula Hazar Din (SHD) - Community Action for Nutrition Project (this project focuses on community mobilization for improved nutrition by addressing the key risk factors during the first thousand days from conception through the first two years of life). The project introduced a multi-sectoral, results-based, community mobilization approach with the expectation that the lessons learned would inform the

government's Operational Manual for the best approach identified to address deficiencies in nutrition. Additionally, the project is also aimed at sensitizing communities and building the readiness to engage in the program both at the local community and government levels. The project completed piloting the Rapid Results for Nutrition Initiatives (RRNIs) in four communities during the 100-day pilot cycle. The project has resulted in a massive scale-up of these initiatives and now involves over 800 new initiatives as of the beginning of June 2014. The photo below shows an event launch for one of the nutrition initiatives in a community outside Kathmandu.



- **Training of social mobilizers and coaches in a results-based, community driven approach to reducing malnutrition** provides technical assistance to the SHD - Community Action for Nutrition Project by preparing training materials, work plans, and methodology to train social mobilizers and coaches in a results-based, community-driven approach to reducing malnutrition. Phase II of training is expected to commence in late 2014.
- **District Profiles of Determinants of Food Insecurity and Malnutrition** gathers nutrition-relevant information as well as stimulates discussion on the multiple determinants of malnutrition among different stakeholders at the district-level, to better understand the district-specific nutrition situation. A tool to determine the district profile was developed and tested in two districts of Nepal - Parsa and Okhaldhunga (Hill and Terai). The project's task team has recently shared and discussed this tool-kit and recommendations with relevant stakeholders, including the National Planning Commission. Based on this deliberation, the need and desire to scale this activity to other districts, will be determined.
- **Small Area Estimation of Food Security and Nutrition** provides estimates (including prevalence, gap and severity), at the sub-district level, which contribute to programming and targeting assistance, and formulating evidence-based policies to attend the most food insecure and malnourished population. Specifically, the study will generate small area estimates of the following key indicators of food insecurity: under-nourishment (measured by kilo calorie intake); and food poverty (measured by the monetary value of consumption intake expressed in local prices). The task is a joint effort undertaken by the WFP, the World Bank and the GoN's Central Bureau of Statistics. The results were achieved and a final report will be completed by 2015.



MOVING FORWARD

With help from DFAT, the second phase of SUNITA will continue doing various analytical work, evaluations of interventions and providing technical assistance to target actions that effectively address gaps in nutrition interventions. This includes more collaboration with external agencies and more testing of actual approaches to improve the food and nutrition security situation throughout Nepal. Moving forward, SUNITA will increase the commitment of governments and development partners to more effectively integrate food and nutrition-related policies and investments.



PARTNERS

SA FANSI

Administered by:  WORLD BANK GROUP



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

¹ Stunting is a primary manifestation of malnutrition in early childhood, including malnutrition during fetal development brought on by the malnourished mother. This irreversible process affects the child during the first two years of life.

² In **Nepal**, SAFANSI has used multiple approaches to address food and nutrition insecurity and has focused on building national commitment to these issues through: 1) Gaining commitment through government and development partners; 2) Strengthening national capacity and programming; and 3) Building evidence, analysis and awareness of food and nutrition security.

Photo credits: World Bank

Front cover image, page 3 and 7: Aisha Faquir; Page 2 and 4: Simone D. McCourtie; Page 5: Curt Carnemark; Page 6: Maria Fleischmann

Achieving Results through Partnerships highlights development results, operational innovations and lessons emerging from the Trust Funds and Partnerships program of the World Bank South Asia region. This results series is produced by the Trust Funds team of the South Asia's Development Effectiveness unit.

Disclaimer: The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Executive Directors of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank or the governments they represent. The World Bank does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work. The boundaries, colors, denominations, and other information shown on any map in this work do not imply any judgment on the part of The World Bank concerning the legal status of any territory or the endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.