



Government Action for Nutrition in South Asia

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Press release

The National Planning Commission (NPC) of Nepal, with funding from the South Asia Food and Nutrition Security Initiative (SAFANSI) is hosting a two-day Roundtable focused on government action for nutrition. SAFANSI is administered by the World Bank with funding from UK Aid from the UK government and the European Commission (EC).

The event, co-sponsored by ten development organizations that support nutrition interventions in the region, targets a mixed group of policymakers, program planners, and nutrition experts who work with Planning Commissions at the national and sub-national levels. The Hon. Vice Chairman of Nepal's National Planning Commission, Dr. Swarnim Wagle, chaired the session and the Hon. Member Prof. Dr. Geeta Bhakta Joshi gave the welcome remarks. Representatives from the international development community were also in attendance.

With an average stunting rate of 33 percent for the region and 12 percent for wasting, South Asia faces some daunting challenges in its fight against malnutrition. Governments in the region have shown clear political commitment to improve nutrition in their countries, so now they are called to initiate clear actions. First and foremost, they need to start considering nutrition as a systemic challenge rather than a sectoral issue, and therefore adopt a multi-sectoral approach in addressing nutrition challenges. Single-sector initiatives do good, yet evidence shows that they must be accompanied with coordination across other sectors and behavior change in order to have a nutrition impact.

Within this framework, SAFANSI is supporting regional efforts towards more integrated food and nutrition security actions by working with existing knowledge networks to develop a strong cadre of advocates, policy-makers, and practitioners. The Roundtable is the first step in this direction. It aims to advance multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral national and subnational efforts and identify the best ways to scale up government nutrition programs for maximum impact. To this end, the discussion will draw on the latest experiences from ongoing nutrition investments in the region to explore the practical challenges of multi-sector nutrition planning.

The event could not have taken place at a more opportune time for Nepal, as highlighted by Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, in the Roundtable opening session. The country made significant achievements in reducing stunting among under-five children from fifty-seven percent in 2001 to thirty-six percent in 2016, yet stunting remains worryingly high. In addition, the recent flooding and landslides in the country resulted in many deaths, reduced livelihoods, and destroyed infrastructure, with potentially negative impacts on nutrition security in the affected areas. Now, as Nepal is transitioning from unitary government to federalism, more opportunities are arising for nutrition to be addressed by local authorities, with efforts led at the local level, supported by adequate budget allocation. In addition, the Multisector Nutrition Plan has focused on enhancing coordination to build local partnerships and institutions across sectors. Within this framework, education, in particular, has a key responsibility as a sector in enhancing adolescent girls and parental education, life skills, and nutrition status by delivering long-lasting behavior change among local children and their families, as stated by Hon. Deputy PM and Ministry for Education, Mr. Gopal Man Shrestha.