

Editorial

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Malnutrition poses a significant challenge to human development and economic growth of nearly every country, including Pakistan. Its repercussions span millions of lost lives, reduced productivity, and increased health burdens that last lifetimes. Globally, every nation faces the serious burden of one or more forms of malnutrition, with women and girls disproportionately bearing the weight of the triple burden of malnutrition.

The National Nutrition Survey (NNS) 2018 indicates that stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies are endemic in Pakistan. Alarming, 40% of children under five are stunted, 18% are wasted, and 12-14% of adolescent girls and women of reproductive age (WRA) are underweight. On the other hand, 24% of WRA are overweight, and 14% are obese. Micronutrient deficiencies are equally concerning, with half of the children under the age of five are anemic and Vitamin A deficient. Similarly, 42% of WRA are anemic, 80% are deficient in Vitamin D, and significant portions lack calcium (27%) and zinc (22%). In addition, one in two adolescent girls (54%) is anemic. These high rates of malnutrition, coupled with underlying complications from early marriages, closely spaced pregnancies, and maternal malnutrition, exacerbate a vicious cycle of high morbidity and mortality, resulting in adverse maternal and child health outcomes.

Nutrition International has been dedicatedly working in Pakistan for over two decades to improve the health of vulnerable people, particularly women and children, through better nutrition. Addressing maternal malnutrition is one of Nutrition International's top priorities, focusing on nutrition counseling, micronutrient supplementation, fortification, and quality care for positive pregnancies and safe births.

To address the alarming maternal health statistics and the critical importance of nutrition counseling for WRA, especially pregnant and lactating women, Nutrition international initiated the "NourishMaa" Maternal Nutrition Campaign in

eight districts across Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. This Campaign aligns with the Government of Pakistan Maternal Nutrition Strategy (PMSN) 2022-27 and is a collaborative initiative with the Ministry of National Health Services Regulations & Coordination, provincial governments, and professional medical associations like Society of Obstetrics & Gynecologist Pakistan (SOGP) and Pakistan Medical Association (PMA). A key component of the campaign is direct engagement with healthcare providers and key opinion leaders, enhancing their knowledge and motivation to effectively address maternal malnutrition.

The campaign has successfully raised awareness about maternal nutrition and strengthened the capacities of Healthcare Providers (HCPs) and Frontline Health Workers (FHWs), both directly and through Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and other stakeholders. This campaign has emerged as the sole pioneer and advocate for maternal nutrition agenda and has made significant progress in catalyzing the commitments stated in the Pakistan Maternal Nutrition strategy (PMNS) 2022-27. With the maturity of the campaign, NourishMaa has set the stage for an enhanced focus on maternal nutrition across the country, engaging all health cadres and policy makers.

Through the targeted high-level policy and advocacy efforts at both provincial and national levels, the campaign has successfully created an enabling environment and reaffirm the commitments of the PMNS 2022. Evidence-based channels and platforms have been developed to disseminate maternal nutrition knowledge through social media, print media, and mass media, reaching and benefiting healthcare providers. A significant milestone has been the creation of the first comprehensive maternal nutrition curriculum for healthcare cadres, which has enhanced the capacities of numerous health professionals. This accredited training equipped them to address the complex nutritional needs of mothers throughout the lifecycle. We are transitioning this

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curriculum into an online Learning Management System (LMS) module to expand its reach and impact. This integration will provide continuous, accessible training for healthcare providers, ensuring they stay updated with the latest maternal nutrition practices and guidelines.

Additionally, the national guidelines for maternal nutrition are being developed for the Maternal and Child Health (MNCH) cadres, setting the stage for standardized, high-quality care nationwide. Moreover, targeted job aids and educational materials have been developed for gynecology/obstetrics OPDs and IPDs, ensuring alignment with WHO global standards. These resources are already enhancing patient counseling and treatment outcomes, creating a ripple effect of positive change. The NourishMaa campaign's influence has expanded beyond its initial scope, reaching provincial capitals through strategic sensitization sessions and policy dialogues, resulting in nationwide demand for NourishMaa's expansion.

While the government, development sector, civil society, professional medical associations, and academia are making strides to improve nutrition indicators in the country, the current malnutrition situation, particularly among women, adolescent girls, and children, demands urgent and collaborative actions. Continuous efforts are needed to highlight the importance of adolescent and maternal nutrition, emphasizing the role of healthcare providers, communities, and households in supporting mothers. Sensitizing healthcare providers about their role and integrating maternal and child nutrition sections into their training curricula is crucial. By doing so, we can equip these frontline workers with the knowledge and tools necessary to break the cycle of malnutrition and pave the way for healthier future generations.

In its commitment to Pakistan's sustainable development, Nutrition International endeavors to help the country achieve its national and international nutrition goals and commitments.