YOUNG & RESILIENT RESEARCH CENTRE

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

ENOUGH
END CHILD HUNGER NOW

World Vision
SOUTH ASIA & PACIFIC

RIGHT TO FOOD

Young People's Call to End Hunger and Malnutrition

Authors

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Foreword **World Vision**

In a world where hunger and malnutrition continue to impact millions of children and adolescents, **it is not only urgent that we act — it is essential that we listen to those most affected: children.** This child-led research report marks a powerful step forward. It places children and young people at the forefront of the research process, equipping them with the skills and confidence to lead, and amplifying their voices in the fight against malnutrition.

This multi-country report is the result of a unique collaboration between **World Vision's South Asia & Pacific regional Changemaker leaders**—through the **Child-led Advocacy and Meaningful Participation (CHAMP)** initiative—and the **Young and Resilient Research Centre (Y&R) at Western Sydney University.** The initiative emerged from the vision and commitment of CHAMP youth leaders following their 2023 conference in Singapore, forming a key part of their critical contribution to World Vision's global ENOUGH campaign.

Covering **Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka,** this report reflects deep engagement through participatory workshops and research toolkits developed by Y&R. Through this process, CHAMP youth leaders not only built research skills—they also mobilised their peers to explore the realities, priorities, and challenges that children and adolescents face around nutrition in their countries.

At World Vision, we believe children and young people are not just beneficiaries — they are **equal partners in development.** Meaningful participation is a cornerstone of our work, and this initiative reflects that commitment in action. It is a testament to the power of **child-led advocacy** to inform policy, advance the **Sustainable Development Goals,** and build a world where no child goes hungry.

We hope this report inspires the youth to continue stepping forward as changemakers—and encourage policymakers, practitioners, and communities to listen and engage with them meaningfully. The insights and recommendations captured here are more than just a contribution—they are a call to action.

This is a profile of **lived experience,** a declaration of **agency**, and a compelling reminder that children and young people are ready to lead alongside us. It is a cry for justice—and a roadmap for collaboration.

Together, we can create a world where **every child is heard, nourished, and empowered to thrive.**

Cherian Thomas
Regional Leader, South Asia & Pacific,
World Vision International

श्री नमुना मा.वि.(९-१२) मुक्तेश्वर
HIGHER SEC.

Foreword **Western Sydney University**

Taking the lead on the fight against hunger in the South Asia and Pacific region

The world is facing a hunger crisis, with over 25 million children currently at risk of starvation and 149 million stunted due to the lack of nutritious food.

It's a situation that no child should face but the reality is that for many in the South Asia and Pacific region, hunger is part of their everyday lives. Home to almost 700 million children aged under 18, the region represents about one-third of the 1.82 billion children around the world.

Hunger, of course, is not just a health problem. It has impacts on economies and social cohesion. Against the backdrop of geopolitical and climate instability, a critical need exists to work towards the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 2 to create a world free of hunger by 2030.

Western Sydney University has topped the Times Higher Education's Impact Rankings for three years in a row for our commitment to furthering the UNSDG goals.

To end world hunger, we know the 700 million children in the South Asia and Pacific region must be given a voice. Putting children and young people at the centre of child-led research empowers them to participate in decision-making that impacts their lives.

As a University, we are proud to play our part in ensuring children who face hunger every day are heard. Through our Young and Resilient Research Centre, we have worked with World Vision International country offices in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, and Sri Lanka to deliver child-led and centred nutrition research.

Informed by children, this report highlights some of the challenges that children and young people experience in trying to access enough nutritious food and how they believe these barriers can be overcome.

They understand that good nutrition underpins good health, and they need this to grow and thrive.

They express that access, affordability, education, pollution and pesticides, and increasingly difficult economic environments impact their ability to eat nutritious foods.

Ultimately, they want to see their recommendations lead to meaningful change and better health outcomes.

I hope we can fulfil that wish, and this report inspires decision-makers to address nutrition and hunger-related issues at a time when it is needed most.

Distinguished Professor George Williams AO
Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University

Executive Summary

Hunger continues to threaten communities across the world, and children and young people are bearing a triple burden of malnutrition. Too many are malnourished, and too many adolescent girls are affected by iron deficiency anaemia. The persistent burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, overnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies) continues to impact children living in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

In the South Asia and Pacific (SAP) region, 30% of five-year-olds are stunted and 14% are wasted (Global Nutrition Report, 2022). Among children and adolescents aged 5-19, the prevalence of thinness is approximately 19.8% in girls and 27.7% in boys, respectively (Global Nutrition Report, 2022). Meanwhile, obesity rates are on the rise, with 7.6% of girls and 8.7% of boys recording a BMI above the average for their age (Global Nutrition Report, 2022).

Frequent climatic events, increased availability of ultra-processed foods, limited access to fresh produce, and the effects of COVID-19, global conflict, and the rising cost of living all contribute to malnutrition in the SAP region (World Bank Group, 2022).

To tackle malnutrition and achieve SDG 2 (zero hunger and improved nutrition) by 2030, World Vision International is striving to reduce food insecurity among children and adolescents.

The ENOUGH campaign aims to tackle child hunger through collective action, engaging directly with children and their communities. At its core is the CHAMP (Child-Led Advocacy and Meaningful Participation) initiative, which empowers young people to lead nutrition research and shape advocacy efforts within their communities.

Fifteen CHAMP youth leaders (aged 13 - 20) from five SAP countries took part in a series of online research capacity-building sessions delivered by the Young and Resilient Research Centre (Y&R) at Western Sydney University. With support from CHAMP mentors, the youth leaders developed their own research projects, collected and analysed data, and crafted their recommendations.

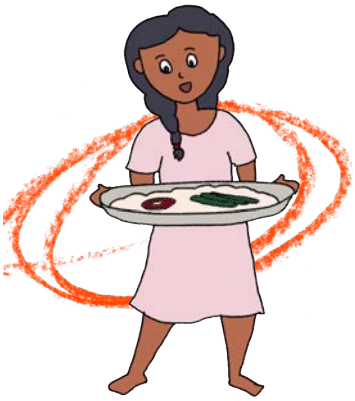
The workshops reached 214 participants across the five countries. Participants were aged 10-18, with roughly two-thirds identifying as female and one-third as male. Ten workshops were held, gathering both quantitative data (surveys) and qualitative data (participatory activities and worksheets).

Children voiced their genuine experiences and insights through activities tailored to each country's research questions and objectives. However, two common activities were used across all workshops; one focused on identifying barriers and enablers to nutritious eating, the other exploring participant's views of ideal nutrition and food security. These were analysed by the Y&R research team to surface some regional key findings.

Key findings

Children and young people recognise that good nutrition supports good health

Children and young people showed deep concern about hunger in their communities, especially its effects on children living in poverty. They clearly understood that nutritious food is essential for growth, health, and development, and that lacking it puts children – particularly younger ones – at risk of serious illness and stunted growth.

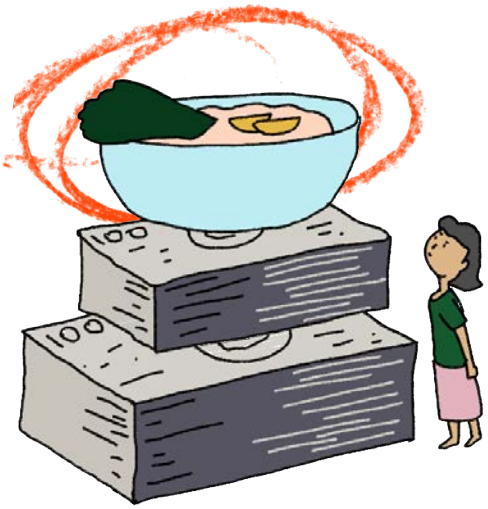


Children and young people want fair and equal access to nutritious food

Children and young people believe nutrition should be a right, not a privilege. They spoke about inequalities in accessing food, noting how families do not have a lot of money rely heavily on instant, processed foods, or 'junk' food, which lack the nutrients children need to stay healthy.

Children and young people want to be provided with nutritious food in schools

Children and young people see their peers going hungry at school. They call for free, nutritious meals, covering breakfast and lunch, and more diverse canteen options, as a way to tackle hunger. They urged governments to extend school meal programmes.



Children and young people see access cost, and food quality are key barriers to eating nutritious foods

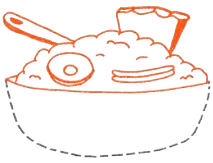
Children and young people identify three major barriers to healthy eating:

1. Limited availability of fresh, nutritious foods in their communities,
2. Rising food prices driven by cost of living;
3. Environmental impact of food systems on food quality, food production, and access to safe drinking water. Children and young people explained that families often cannot afford fresh produce due to rising food prices, and that local food systems are failing to provide safe, accessible options. They also noted that the quality of fresh, nutritious food is being compromised by high levels of chemicals and pollution.

Change is needed through increased access, affordability, education, and stronger policies

Children and young people outlined key areas for government action: improve access to affordable nutritious food; provide better nutrition education in schools and communities; reduce the availability of fast food; and strengthen policies to ensure healthier diets. They believe governments have a responsibility to act to protect children's health and ensure better outcomes.

Recommendations



Prioritise and invest in nutrition for all
Governments and leaders must ensure all children and young people have access to fresh, nutritious food by making it a community-wide priority and investing in long-term solutions.

Guarantee equal rights to food
Children and young people called for action to uphold their right to nutrition. This includes better use of local farmland and financial or food support for families most in need.

Make schools central to nutrition efforts
School environments should provide regular meals and embed nutrition education in the curriculum. Children want schools to be places where no one goes hungry and where food choices support healthy growth.

Tackle poverty to protect food equality
Young people urged governments to address the root causes of hunger—like inflation and unemployment—by funding social protection systems that ensure families can afford enough healthy food.

Improve food systems and food safety
Participants highlighted the need for safer farming practices with fewer chemicals, more local food production, and greater support for sustainable, climate-smart agriculture involving young people, and called for local governments to support local farming and community gardens to ensure sustainable food access.

Educate communities on nutrition
Children and young people strongly stressed the importance of nutrition education not just in school, but also in homes and communities, so that parents and caregivers can support better nutritional choices.

Strengthen food-related policies and regulation
Children and young people called for better laws and oversight to protect children's health, including pricing controls, social protection systems and restrictions on unhealthy food marketing and pesticide use.

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Background

Children have the right to food (UNCRC article 27, 1989), yet globally, 148 million children under 5 are stunted, 45 million children under 5 are acutely undernourished (UNICEF & WHO 2023) and 38.9 million children are overweight (Global nutrition report 2021). In the South Asia and Pacific (SAP) region, children face a triple burden of malnutrition (ASEAN, UNICEF and WFP, 2022; UNICEF, 2017). This refers to the simultaneous occurrence of undernutrition (underweight, wasting and stunting), overnutrition (overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases) and micronutrient deficiencies—at both individual population levels throughout the life course (Popkin et al., 2020; WHO, n.d.).

Globally, the double burden of malnutrition is particularly pronounced in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Popkin et al., 2020). In the SAP region, about 30% of children under five are stunted and approximately 14% are wasted (Global Nutrition Report, 2022). Among children and adolescents aged 5-19, the prevalence of thinness is 19.8% for girls and 27.7% for boys. Meanwhile, obesity is on the rise: 7.6% of girls and 8.7% of boys have an above-average BMI for their age (Global Nutrition Report, 2022).

The region is experiencing a 'youth bulge,' with the population of 12–24-year-olds expected to reach 435 million in 2030 before gradually declining (World Bank 2012). Investing in the nutrition and wellbeing of this generation—future workers, parents, citizens, and leaders—is vital for sustained economic growth and development.

All forms of malnutrition are increasing in the region, driven by changing food systems, the rising availability of ultra-processed foods, and limited access to fresh, nutritious food. These challenges have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, global conflicts, rising living costs, and climate change. Greater attention is needed in food policy and programming to ensure all children and young people have access to adequate nutrition (World Bank Group, 2022).

World Vision International is committed to advancing Sustainable Development Goal 2 (zero hunger and improved nutrition) by addressing food insecurity in the SAP region. One regional example is the worsening food crisis in the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar Bangladesh, home to over one million Rohingya people (Lelijveld et al 2025). Over an 18-month period, 150,000 new arrivals were documented (UNHCR, 2025) while an average of 100 births per day has been recorded (IFRC, 2025).

In partnership with the World Food Program (WFP), World Vision has reached more than **253,000 refugees** with food assistance, helping to prevent and treat malnutrition in children under five and in pregnant and breastfeeding mothers—many of them adolescents—through vouchers for vitamin-rich, high-protein food items (World Vision 2025).

Children and young people in this humanitarian crisis face severe food insecurity, with adolescent pregnancies further affecting the nutritional health of young girls (Lelijveld et al 2025).

World Vision's ENOUGH campaign was launched with the belief that every family deserves to have enough of the right food on their table (World Vision International, 2024). With a vision of ending child hunger and nutrition through collective action, the campaign is grounded in listening to children and young people to understand their lived experiences of hunger and malnutrition. By doing this, World Vision aims to connect their voices with the actions of governments and global leaders to drive meaningful change. A key goal of this project is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to lead advocacy initiatives in their communities across the SAP region.

In 2023, the World Vision International Child-Led Advocacy and Meaningful Participation (CHAMP) youth leaders from across South Asia and Pacific met in Singapore and identified the need for a multi-country, child-led research project on hunger and nutrition. Building on the momentum of the ENOUGH campaign, World Vision partnered with the Young and Resilient Research Centre (Y&R) at Western Sydney University to co-lead this effort.

World Vision's CHAMP Child-led research aligns closely with Y&R's commitment to amplifying the voices and experiences of children and adolescents. Y&R has contributed to the field of child-centred nutrition and health research through initiatives such as:

- FIX MY FOOD: Children's Views on transforming food systems (2019)
- The Development of Global Child and Adolescent-Centred Nutrition Indicators (CAN_I) (2022)

Most recently, Y&R produced the Global Child and Adolescent-Centred Nutrition Indicators (CAN_I) using child-centred, participatory methods to offer a more holistic view of nutrition from a socio-ecological perspective. They complement existing biometric measures by centring children's own insights into the factors that influence their nutritional intake.

Methodology **at a Glance**

Research into the lives of children and young people is most effective when grounded in approaches that centre their perspectives (Ben-Arieh 2008; Olsen 2024). Child-led research in particular offers meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in decisions that affect them, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (Cuevas-Parra & Tisdall 2019). Children and young people bring unique knowledge, skills and lived experience to research (Larsson et al 2018). By empowering them to investigate and challenge issues in their communities, we gain deeper insight into their experiences while empowering a new generation of researchers.

Y&R partnered with World Vision to support 15 CHAMP youth leaders from five SAP countries with research capacity-building training. These youth leaders came to the project with a range of experience. The training sessions were tailored to provide foundational knowledge to some and to build on the existing skills of others. All youth leaders were equipped to carry out their own research, from developing questions to analysing data.

Each CHAMP youth leader created a research question based on their lived experiences and community context. They co-designed and facilitated workshops with children and adolescents and analysed the findings. This work supports the goals of World Vision's ENOUGH campaign and will inform current and future advocacy efforts.

Between July 2024 and March 2025, researchers from Y&R working closely with World Vision Country Offices in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Y&R developed bespoke toolkits and led training sessions to strengthen the capacity of youth leaders to conduct community-based, child-led research on nutrition.

The World Vision
CHAMP Youth Leaders

Youth capacity-building

Drawing on Y&R's existing youth co-research training, five online workshops (each 3 hours) were delivered to CHAMP youth leaders and their mentors. These workshops were supported by a suite of resources and toolkits designed to equip the CHAMP leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to lead their own research projects. Training topics included:

1. Introduction to research
2. Developing research questions
3. Planning and designing workshops
4. Data analysis and report writing
5. Data analysis refresher

Each session featured interactive, group-based learning and gave youth leaders opportunities to work with their country teams and mentors to develop their research projects. To complement these workshops, Y&R developed research toolkits aligned with each stage of the process—covering workshop design and delivery, as well as data translation and analysis. Toolkits were written in plain English to reduce barriers caused by academic language and included checklists, templates, and clear guidance for each research step.

Youth-led research design

CHAMP youth leaders identified an issue affecting child and adolescent nutrition in their country and developed a research question centred around it. A qualitative, participatory workshop approach to surface the views and lived experiences of young participants. This methodology fosters a youth-friendly environment where children and adolescents can safely express their ideas and propose solutions to hunger and malnutrition. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, a positive, strengths-based approach was used to guide the design.

Y&R supported the CHAMP youth leaders in developing a three-hour workshop agenda, drawing Y&R supported the CHAMP youth leaders in developing a three-hour workshop agenda, drawing from a library of pre-designed activities.Two core activities—Snakes and Ladders and Letter to the President, were standardised across all countries to ensure cross-country comparison. These explored barriers and enablers to accessing nutritious foods, and the actions children and adolescents wanted to see from decisionmakers to improve child and adolescent nutrition in their communities. The remaining three activities were selected or designed by the CHAMP youth leaders to align with their country-specific research questions. The aims and objectives of these activities can be viewed in Appendix 1: Food and Nutrition Workshop Activity Toolkit. Y&R provided feedback on all proposed activities to optimise data collection.

Ethics approval was granted by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC, approval number H16273). In addition, domestic legislation in various countries requires that all health-related research undergo ethics review. In Nepal, ethics approval was granted by the Nepal Human Research Council (Ref. No. 1190). In Bangladesh, approval was received from the Dhaka University ethics committee (approval number IHE/IRB/DU/76/2024/Final). Other participating countries were not required to obtain local ethics approval for this research.

Youth-led data collection

World Vision country offices and CHAMP mentors supported CHAMP youth leaders in recruiting children and adolescents through their existing programme networks. Informed consent obtained from all participants and their caregivers before workshops took place.

CHAMP youth leaders, with the support of mentors, facilitated one three-hour, face-to-face or online workshop in each country. All workshops were delivered in local languages. Participants engaged in various creative and participatory activities—individually, in pairs, and in small groups—customised to reflect local culture and research questions.

Youth-led data analysis

After workshops concluded, data was translated into English by World Vision country teams and securely uploaded for analysis. Each country's data was entered into country-specific Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, where CHAMP youth leaders led the analysis, supported by their mentors and the Y&R team.

Using a simplified thematic style analysis method and a Y&R-designed worksheet, CHAMP youth leaders coded and interpreted their data to identify key themes and insights. The Y&R team then validated these findings to ensure accurate interpretation and appropriate contextualisation.

Country-level findings were compiled into snapshot reports by each CHAMP youth leader group. Y&R synthesised these to produce a regional-level analysis, highlighting both shared and unique experiences across the South Asia Pacific region.

Key findings from the **South Asia and Pacific Region**

Regional summary

Across the five participating SAP countries—each with distinct landscapes, cultures, religions and traditions—children and young people shared strikingly similar views about what must change to improve nutrition in their communities. Despite their differences, they spoke with a unified voice about the barriers they face and the solutions they want to see.

Children and young people understand that good nutrition underpins good health

Children and young people across all countries clearly linked good nutrition to better health. They recognise hunger, malnutrition, and stunting as urgent issues—particularly among children living in poverty. Children and young people understand the need for nutritious diets from a young age to help them to grow and thrive. They also recognise that it is easy for children and young people to develop a distaste for fresh nutritious foods reliance on if they are not exposed to these from a young age, leading them to develop a diet dependent on the consumption of less optimal processed foods as they grow older. Young people want the importance of good nutrition as a critical factor to improve their health to be known more widely by their peers, parents and communities.

Participants expressed a strong desire for greater awareness about nutrition within families and communities, believing that better education could lead to healthier choices and improved wellbeing.

> ***"It is very important to pay attention [to nutrition] because it can make stunted children."***
>
> - Indonesia
>
> ***"Many children and young people in my village are suffering from stunted growth and memory loss due to malnutrition. We need to create awareness about malnutrition and its root causes."***
>
> - Sri Lanka
>
> ***"Help children access the food they need to grow."***
>
> - Philippines

Children and young people want nutritional equality for everyone

Participants voiced deep concern for children in their communities who lack access to nutritious food. They described an ideal world where healthy food is a basic right, not a privilege. Many noted that families with fewer resources often rely on 'instant foods', junk food, and processed products—which are cheaper but far less nutritious.

Rising food prices and economic hardship were highlighted as major barriers to healthy eating. Participants called on governments to take action by improving farming support, providing financial and food assistance to vulnerable families, and making nutritious foods more affordable and accessible.

"Every child and every family having access to healthy, nutritious food."

- Bangladesh

"The government should help to establish awareness programs and provide proper food facilities."

- Nepal

"All the children can be provided with nutritious food. Fast food must be completely avoided. Farmers must be assisted with fertilizers and seeds at subsidized price in order to expand their cultivation."

- Sri Lanka

Children and young people want to be provided with nutritious food in schools

School-based food programmes were seen as a key solution to malnutrition and hunger. Children called for free, nutritious meals, including breakfast, and healthier canteen options. They noted that some of their peers go without food due to poverty, making school meals especially important.

Participants from Indonesia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka strongly advocated for improvements in school food systems. In Nepal, youth noted that food brought from home was often healthier than what was offered at school, and they called for restrictions on junk food sales.

"I care about children with disabilities/malnutrition so I want free food to arrive at my school as soon as possible."

- Indonesia

"Many children or people around us who still lack the ability to eat nutritious food."

- Indonesia

"I think there should be made strict rules and regulations to bring nutritious food only and not junk food. The food provided in the canteen should also be healthy food and not junk food."

- Nepal

"I request you to introduce a breakfast program for the backward schools in our area ... By increasing the nutritional level in our area, we can enrich the future of our children and improve their educational levels."

- Sri Lanka

Children and young people face barriers to nutritious foods and safe drinking water

Across all five countries, children and young people identified common barriers that prevent them from accessing safe, nutritious food and clean drinking water. These barriers include limited availability, rising costs, and concerns about environmental degradation, poor food quality, and water scarcity. They understand how these challenges are deeply linked to poverty, food systems, and government policy—and they are calling for change.

Limited access to fresh, nutritious foods

Children and young people in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines spoke about the difficulty of finding fresh, nutritious food close to home. Often, families must travel far to access healthy ingredients. In Nepal and Indonesia, participants noted that "junk foods" are far more accessible and easier to prepare, leading to a reliance on these less nutritious options.

> ***"Inadequacy of the availability of enough nutritious food."***
>
> - Bangladesh
>
> ***"Junk foods are easier to get and most of them consumed without cooking."***
>
> - Nepal
>
> ***"Hard transportation to go to stores that sell healthy foods."***
>
> - Philippines
>
> ***"Because the food or staple ingredients are hard to find."***
>
> - Indonesia

Affordability and economic impact

Participants from all countries highlighted the economic barriers to nutrition. Rising prices, unemployment, and high import duties were all seen as major obstacles to accessing healthy food. Even when nutritious food is available, it is often unaffordable. Children and young people emphasised that families are increasingly turning to cheaper fast foods or processed items, even though they know these are less healthy.

> ***"The inhibiting factor for eating nutritious food is that access to buy nutritious foods is both economic and difficult to obtain."***
>
> - Bangladesh
>
> ***"Healthy products are often priced higher than junk food."***
>
> - Nepal
>
> ***"Parents in our area, who are facing economic crises, are finding it difficult to provide nutritious food to their children."***
>
> - Sri Lanka

Young people also recognised that poverty not only affects current food choices but shapes eating habits for life. They expressed concern that if children grow up without access to fresh foods, they may develop a disinterest or aversion to healthy eating as they become more independent. They emphasise the importance of early childhood nutrition and recognise that financial stress on parents can directly affect a child's health.

> ***"Weak financial situations which causes families to be unable to take care of the children and themselves."***
>
> - Nepal
>
> ***"Food prices are getting more expensive, no one has money."***
>
> - Indonesia
>
> ***"...when mothers do not consume nutritious food during their pregnancy due to economic crisis and suffer from malnutrition, their children are born weak and stunted."***
>
> - Sri Lanka

Food systems, food quality, and environmental impact

Children and young people showed a strong understanding of how food systems and environmental factors affect nutrition. They spoke about the excessive use of chemicals, pesticides, and pollution, which they believe lower the quality and safety of the food available in their communities. These concerns were raised most often in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

> ***"Because of the excessive use of chemicals, pesticides, [and] formalin, the nutritional value has severely compromised."***
>
> - Bangladesh
>
> ***"Use of pesticides and insecticides in the vegetables that are found in the market."***
>
> - Nepal
>
> ***"Waste of factories which goes to rivers and lands, reduces the quality and safety of crops and fish."***
>
> - Bangladesh

Participants also noted the impact of urban development and poor land management. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, children discussed how unplanned construction reduces spaces for farming, which limits the community's ability to grow healthy food. They viewed farming and home gardening as important solutions to improving food access and sustainability.

> ***"[A barrier to eating nutritious foods is] unplanned urbanization (use of fertile land for construction)."***
>
> - Nepal
>
> ***"Proper planning on the constructional and non-constructional lands and provide with perfect platforms to the farmers so they can cultivate the crops."***
>
> - Nepal

> ***"Stay dedicated to growing more fruits and vegetables in your area."***
>
> - Philippines
>
> ***"Preparing compost using garbage, engage in home gardening."***
>
> - Sri Lanka

Safe drinking water

Concerns around drinking water were particularly prominent in Nepal and Sri Lanka. Children noted that water scarcity and poor water quality affect both their health and access to nutrition. They described school environments where water is either unavailable or unsafe and asked for urgent government support.

> ***"Here, we do not get water properly, and the water that comes is dirty."***
>
> - Nepal
>
> ***"I am writing this letter to you because due to lack of drinking water in our school there is a negative impact on the health of students. I request you to please prepare proper drinking water system for us."***
>
> - Nepal
>
> ***"Lack of water resources", "water scarcity."***
>
> - Sri Lanka

Change is needed: accessibility, affordability, education, and regulation will improve nutrition for children and young people

Young people across all five countries expressed a strong desire for actions that improve nutrition through better accessibility, affordability, education, and regulation. They want leaders to prioritise their health and future by addressing the barriers they face now.

> ***"Some young people in Indonesia have not yet had access to nutritious food, therefore the president must take a decision for the future of young people."***
>
> - Indonesia

Education and awareness

Participants called for better nutrition education in schools and communities. They believe that equipping children and parents with knowledge about healthy eating—and how to prepare nutritious meals—will support better decision-making and long-term health. Many stressed without early education, children may never learn the value of a nutritious diet.

They want to be taught not just what to eat, but how to cook and why it matters.

"Raising awareness among youth about the importance of a healthy diet."

- Sri Lanka

"Socialization is very important because many children are aware that vegetables are healthy, not all trending foods are healthy, so we have to be smart to choose."

- Indonesia

"Teach children about the affects of malnutrition, and spread awareness across society, create weekly programs about nutrition."

- Nepal

In addition to learning about nutrition themselves, participants believe it's essential for parents and adults to also receive education about healthy food. They want to see community-based programmes that promote awareness of the importance of nutrition for children, so that parents can make informed decisions about the food they provide.

"Provide education to parents to cook nutritious food."

- Indonesia

"Train parents to prepare simple but healthy food for their children."

- Philippines

Policy and government action

Children and young people want governments to invest in their health and wellbeing through stronger policies, regulations, and programmes that promote access to nutritious food. They are particularly concerned about the rising cost of food and believe governments should introduce fair pricing policies, monitor markets, and subsidise essential food items to ensure affordability for all. This was especially emphasised by participants in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"Implement fair pricing policies, market monitoring, and government subsidies for essential food items."

- Indonesia

"Insufficient government attention to lowering the prices of goods."

- Sri Lanka

They also want governments to increase food provision programmes for those in need and expand social protection to ensure all families have access to adequate nutrition. Suggestions included school meals and breakfast programmes that would help reduce malnutrition and support healthy growth.

"Please provide feedings program for children malnutrition to make them healthy."

- Philippines

"My advice to schools is that they should implement a nutritious eating program because this is very important for children."

- Indonesia

Food safety and organic practices

In Sri Lanka and across the region, children and young people expressed concerns about the safety and quality of food, especially the use of chemicals, pesticides, and additives that reduce nutritional value and may pose health risks. They want to see increased government regulation to reduce chemical use and promote organic and sustainable farming practices.

"Urge you to close distribution of junk foods in our market and if possible, provide suggestion to increase the use of organic foods found in our village and teach the children about the effects of malnutrition and spread awareness across our society."

- Nepal

"Promote organic farming, regulate harmful chemical usage, and raise awareness about safe food production."

- Bangladesh

"By reducing the use of artificial pesticides, we can get good vegetables."

- Sri Lanka

In addition, children and young people see junk foods as too cheap and too easy to access, particularly in school canteens and local shops. They want to see tighter regulations on the sale and marketing of unhealthy food, alongside increased access to fresh, nutritious alternatives. They believe governments have a responsibility to limit the availability of fast food and ensure that healthy choices are prioritised in their communities.

"Malnutrition can lead to various diseases. Therefore, we request that government to take necessary steps to provide breakfast to the children."

- Sri Lanka

"Easier access to nutritious foods more effective government policies and programs."

- Indonesia

What do the CAN_I indicators reveal **about the SAP region?**

CHAMP research leaders across the five SAP countries selected key CAN_I indicators that they considered essential for tracking progress in their communities. Children and young people responded to these indicators during workshops, sharing their lived experiences and perceptions. The results were categorised using a 'traffic light' system—indicating levels of concern, from low to very high—highlighting areas where urgent action is needed.

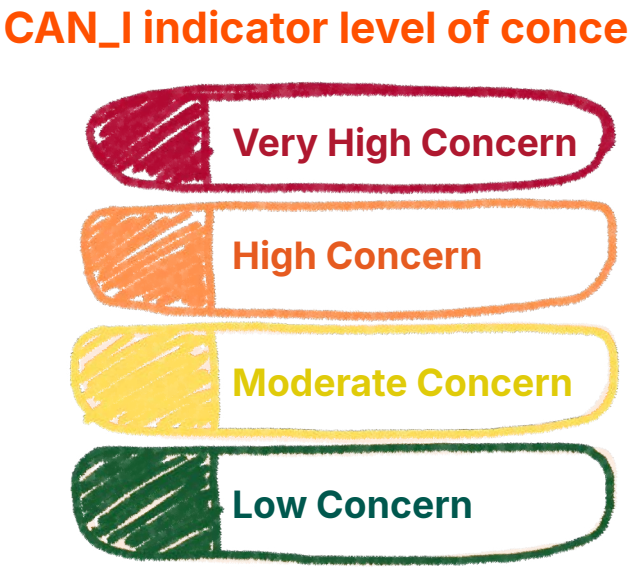


Figure 1: Example of the indicator 'traffic light' system scoring

Where indicators were used across multiple countries, regional comparisons were made. Additional country-specific indicators are reported in each country's individual report.

Children and young people in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Indonesia reported a moderate level of concern about equal access to nutritious food within their households. Their responses suggest that one third of children feel they have equal access to sufficient and healthy food at home. This concern was echoed in workshop discussions in these three countries (see in country reports).

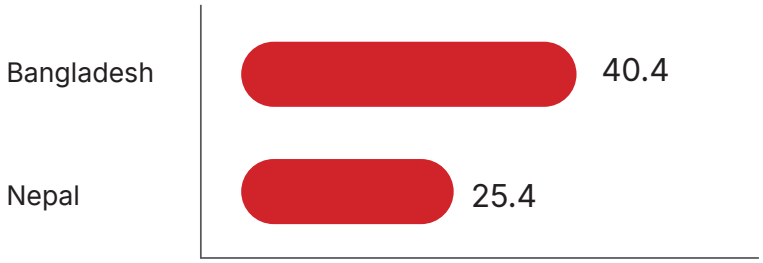
CAN_I Indicator #7.1 Number of children and adolescents who say they have equal access to sufficient and affordable nutritious food

I am always able to eat nutritious food as easily as my friends, brother or sister and classmates

In Nepal and Bangladesh, children and young people reported high concern about the lack of nutrition education and cooking instruction in schools. Many indicated they rarely receive information about healthy eating or practical cooking skills, highlighting a need for greater investment in school-based nutrition education.

CAN_I Indicator #11.10 Number of children and adolescents who are taught about food and practical cooking skills at school

I learn about food and cooking at school



Children and young people from Nepal and Sri Lanka indicated they did not have sufficient nutritional knowledge and skills to understand food labelling. This outcome indicates a high level of concern that children and young people do not have the nutritional knowledge or skills to understand food labels to better guide their nutritional choices. From this outcome measure it is evident better investment in nutrition education within schools is needed to address this deficit.

CAN_I Indicator #4.3 Number of children and adolescents who understand how to read labels of food packaging and have an understanding of the contents

When I read the labels on food, I can understand how much sugar, salt and fats are in the food and what the numbers mean for my health

Country Snapshots

The following snapshots are drawn from project reports composed by the CHAMP leaders trained through this project to lead workshops for children and young people across their communities. Honouring the child-led nature of this research and the importance of platforming child and youth perspectives in this context, these reports are presented as they were written - by an inspiring group of young people utilising their research skills to advocate for the improvement of nutrition for children across the South Asia and Pacific region. The entire country project reports can be found in the appendices of this report.

Bangladesh

Improving Nutrition for Young People in Bangladesh: Key Findings and Recommendations

Authors: Auntika, Konok, Nazibur

Introduction:

Access to nutritious food is a fundamental right, yet many people in Bangladesh struggle to afford and access healthy options. Economic hardships, food safety concerns, misinformation, environmental challenges, and climate change further worsen the situation. Malnutrition and food insecurity affect millions, particularly children, hindering their growth and development. This report highlights the key findings from our research and aligns with the ENOUGH Campaign and Bangladesh Government's Priority Indicators to improve nutrition for young people in Bangladesh.

Research Question

How do economic, environmental, and social factors impact access to nutritious food in Bangladesh, and what can be done to improve food security and nutrition for young people?

Key Findings

- **Nutritious Food is Unaffordable for Many:** Many participants reported that high food prices, inflation, and economic instability prevent them from purchasing healthy food. "I like eggs, but they are too expensive for my father to buy regularly. Market mismanagement and hoarding make nutritious food unaffordable." Solution: Job creation, fair pricing policies, and government subsidies can improve affordability.

- **Food Safety is Compromised by Weak Regulations:** Participants expressed concerns about unsafe food practices, including excessive chemical use and market syndicates controlling supply and pricing. “Most foods contain formalin, and sellers repeatedly add more to extend shelf life. Food contamination leads to serious health risks, including kidney damage.” Solution: Strengthening food safety laws, eliminating corruption, and monitoring food markets.
- **Environmental and Industrial Hazards Threaten Food Safety:** Deforestation, pollution, and unethical industrial practices negatively impact food quality and the environment. “Plastic waste, chemicals, and deforestation are making food unsafe.” Solution: Implementing eco-friendly agricultural and industrial practices to safeguard food quality.
- **Misinformation and Lack of Awareness Affect Healthy Choices:** Misinformation about food, influenced by misleading advertising and cultural superstitions, often leads to unhealthy dietary choices. “In our community, rice is the staple of most meals, and many people don’t have a clear understanding of what a balanced diet looks like. Also Many people lack knowledge about harmful chemicals in food.” Solution: Public awareness campaigns and food education programmes to ensure informed choices.
- **Climate Change is Disrupting Food Security:** Unpredictable weather patterns, floods, and droughts are reducing agricultural productivity. “Climate change makes farming unpredictable, affecting food supply.” Solution: Promoting climate-resilient farming techniques and investing in food storage infrastructure.

Strategic Initiatives for Change

To address these challenges, the following programmes and initiatives are recommended:

1. Sustainable Agriculture Training
    - Conduct workshops on crop rotation, organic farming, and water management.
    - Provide training, seeds, tools, and financial support for farmers.
2. System Strengthening
    - Implement Citizen Voice and Action (CVA)[1] to scale up policy implementation.
    - Facilitate child and youth-led dialogue and petition for budget advocacy.
3. School Meal Programmes
    - Advocate for nutritious meals in schools to ensure children receive balanced diets.
    - Conduct regular health check-ups to monitor child growth and development.
4. Community Nutrition Initiative
    - Organise PD/Hearth[2] sessions to teach families how to prepare nutritious meals using locally available ingredients.
    - Provide health education on children’s nutritional needs.
5. Referral Linkage and Food Distribution Networks
    - Partner with local organisations to strengthen food distribution systems.
    - Provide immediate food or cash support in emergency situations.

[1] Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) is a local level advocacy and social accountability approach that facilitates dialogue between communities and government in order to improve services (like health care and education) that impact the daily lives of children and their families. - Source CVA Guidance Notes 2019

[2] Positive Deviance/Hearth is a community-based approach to improve child nutrition by learning from families who succeed despite facing similar challenges as others. These “positive deviants” use effective practices—like better feeding, hygiene, or care—that help their children grow healthy. In small group sessions called “Hearths,” caregivers come together to learn and practice these successful behaviour’s using local foods and resources.

Call to Action: What Needs to Change?

To improve food security and nutrition for young people in Bangladesh, the following actions are necessary:

- Economic Support: Implement fair pricing policies, reduce hoarding, and create job opportunities.
- Stronger Regulations: Enforce strict food safety laws and eliminate corruption in the food industry.
- Environmental Protection: Adopt eco-friendly agricultural and industrial practices.
- Public Awareness Campaigns: Educate communities about healthy eating habits and combat food-related misinformation.
- Support for Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Agriculture: Invest in local farming, improve food storage systems, and promote sustainable farming techniques.
- Increased Budget Allocation: Advocate for adequate funding to end child malnutrition at the Union level.
- Improved Monitoring: Strengthen the integrated monitoring system of nutrition activities at the District level.
- Equitable Food Distribution: Ensure need-based food allocation across all districts.

Conclusion:

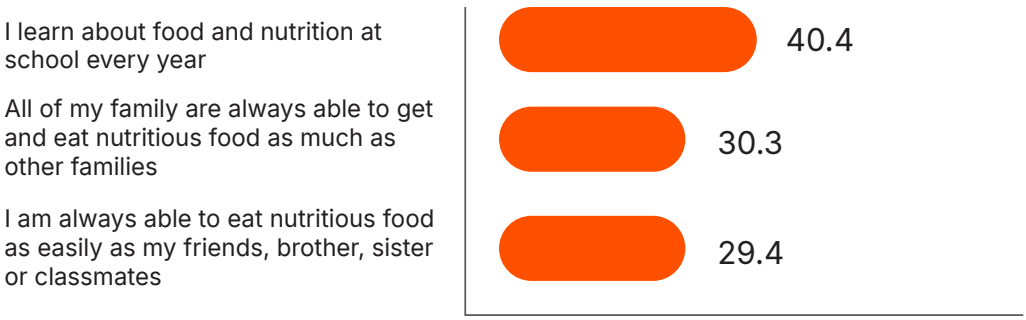
By addressing these critical issues, we can create a healthier future for young people in Bangladesh, ensuring that nutritious food is accessible to all.

Ensuring food security and nutrition for all, especially children, is not just a policy goal—it is a necessity for Bangladesh's sustainable development. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-sectoral approach, with government, civil society, private sector, and individuals working together to create lasting solutions. Through strong policies, community engagement, and evidence-based programmes, we can break the cycle of malnutrition and food insecurity. Every child deserves access to nutritious food, and together, we can make that a reality.

We have enough to end child food insecurity, we just need to work together for the collective responsibility for a healthier future.

CAN_I indicators selected and measured for Bangladesh

Bangladesh: Level of concern score



Indonesia

The Barriers and Supporting Factors for Children to Consume Nutritious Food

Authors: Valentina, Nur, Flora

Introduction:

Nutritious food is essential for children's growth and development. Since January 2025, the Indonesian government is actively implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program to improve child nutrition, but this programme is not yet evenly distributed across all regions in Indonesia. We also ask the participant about this programme. By understanding the factors that support and inhibit children's consumption of nutritious food, we can improve children's health according to their age, and can reduce the risk of diseases and conditions that adversely affect children.

The fulfillment of children's rights must be met by the State, the Government, the community and every adult around them, and young people and children have a role to play in promoting this. Research by children also encourages children to become agents of change. This study aims to identify the challenges children face in accessing nutritious food, as well as the factors that support or hinder their ability to consume nutritious food. This can be an input for the government and other parties so that children's input can be implemented in policies and programmes that have an impact on their lives.

Research Question

Specifically, this study collected data and information on:

- Are children aware of what constitutes nutritious food?
- How is food managed and distributed?
- Problems/issues faced by children in consuming nutritious food.
- What are the barriers that prevent children from consuming nutritious food?
- What are the things that support children to consume nutritious food?
- Expectations/desired changes for children to be able to consume nutritious food

Key Findings

- Most participants understand the difference between nutritious and non-nutritious foods. They gain this knowledge from school, posyandu (community health centers), parents, and social media. However, they rarely receive such information from friends, and **some children are even influenced by their peers to eat unhealthy food.**
- In rural areas, to get family food, vegetables can be picked from gardens, fields, and protein must be bought at the market. In urban areas, all foodstuffs must be bought at the market because there is no land to grow vegetables or fruit, and **there are even children who have to work first in order to get food.**
- In rural and urban areas, meat is rarely consumed due to its high cost, and fruit is eaten infrequently (less than twice a week) because it is expensive and seasonal. The way of preparing food varies, such as boiling, stir-frying and the most preferred by children is fried method.
- Besides home-cooked meals, children also eat food from school canteens, which usually serve instant meals in styrofoam containers, such as instant noodles with high amounts of MSG and salt, as well as sugary and preservative-laden instant sachet drinks.
- Children know what foods their area produces and are accustomed to eating these foods, such as children eating fish because it is cheaper in areas where children live by the sea, and in villages eating local vegetables such as yam leaves, etc.
- From the survey, it was found that there was 1 child who could never eat nutritious food easily like his friends, brothers/sisters and classmates. Then 1 child was not sure, 19 children were sometimes and 9 children were always able to eat nutritious foods easily like their friends, brothers/sisters and classmates.

Factors inhibiting children from consuming nutritious food

- **Families have no money for healthy food.** More than 50% of participants (17 out of 30 children) stated that the biggest factor in children not being able to eat nutritious food is due to economic factors. Food prices continue to rise and parents cannot afford it. There are even some children who become buskers to be able to buy simple food. “There is not enough food, mothers are lazy to cook and some children become buskers to buy food”
- The second factor that makes children not consume nutritious food is because **parents lack the knowledge and skills to cook delicious nutritious food.** This makes children bored and eventually parents become reluctant/lazy to cook nutritious food.
- Another factor that is quite influential is also **the eating habits of children since childhood where parents and their environment are not accustomed to consuming nutritious foods** such as vegetables, and choose fast food so that this is carried over until the child grows up and eventually chooses to consume unhealthy food.
- **Another factor preventing teenagers from consuming nutritious food is FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).** Many choose trendy foods to keep up with social trends, even when these foods are unhealthy. This can be negative because it will damage their health. Not all trendy foods are healthy, they are trendy because of the media, advertisements and social media without thinking about health and nutrition. **Not all families are ready to provide nutritious food because they have to work so they choose instant food.**

Recommendations

1. Government:

a. Central Government:

- Social assistance for the vulnerable families to buy nutritious foodstuffs
- Lower food prices
- Free Nutritious Meal Programme that is evenly distributed in the regions
- Strict regulations from the government on food products that contain sugar and are harmful to children
- The government can create employment opportunities for parents to help them afford nutritious food for their children.
- There are regulations, programmes for parents to prepare and children to eat nutritious food.

b. Regional Government:

- The government (Health Office) provides education to the community (buyers and sellers) about nutritious food, conducts socialisation about the dangers of fast food for health in children.
- Increase socialisation and education to the lowest elements of society related to child nutrition and child protection in collaboration with relevant regional apparatus, Children's Forum and Forum GENRE (Planning Generations Forum).
- The government is working with regional influencers and the Children's Forum to increase educational content on nutritious food and child protection.
- There needs to be socialisation from health posts and training on eating nutritious food from an early age in collaboration with related agencies and institutions.
- Cooking training for parents in collaboration with relevant agencies and institutions
- Training on processing local and traditional food ingredients into nutritious and attractive food ingredients
- Create interesting programmes in the region on health and child protection through seminars, nutritious food bazaars, socialisation, how to cook nutritious food easily and deliciously.
- Village/ regional government together with Puskesmas/village health workers provide education/conduct socialisation on healthy lifestyles and nutrition of adolescent boys and girls, reproductive health regularly through various media, as well as counseling and distribution of Iron and Folic (IFA) Tablets for adolescent girls.

2. School:

- The school provides education and socialisation materials on health and child protection, education on nutrition literacy such as ingredients and composition of healthy food for consumption
- Implement a free nutritious meal programme at school

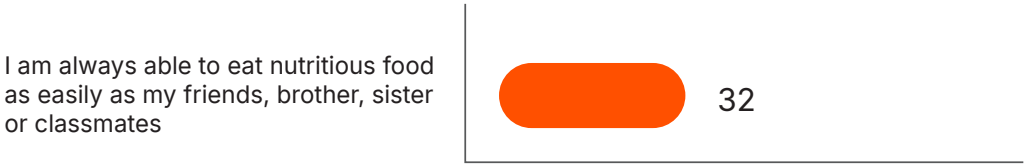
- Distribute of Iron and Folic (IFA) Tablets for adolescent girls regularly
- Encourages school canteen and street food around school sell nutritious food.
- Create products with healthy and attractive ingredients and become a trend, promoting local ingredients to become a trend.
- Various media platforms should be utilised to educate the public through articles and social media posts about nutritious food.
- Interesting content about nutritious food is created by public figures/influencers and can also involve children's forums and children's groups as a media for them to express their voices.
- The socialisation of healthy food is also a lot delicious, Selection of food ingredients that are widely liked by the community and proper processing Social media factors. Because GEN-Z children usually prefer to scroll on social media, so there may be healthy food content but not boring and suitable for the mouths of GEN-Z children.

3. Parents, family and community:

- Parents should pay attention to balanced nutritional needs by providing healthy and nutritious food at home and socialisation to increase understanding of the issue of stunting and adolescent nutrition.
- To religious leaders to provide faith refreshment related to the importance of being sensitive and aware of the issue of stunting and nutrition in adolescents.
- To traditional leaders/community leaders to often open dialogues with teenagers and parents and become intermediaries for children to convey their aspirations, opinions, and suggestions to the village.
- For teenagers (12-17 years old) to know the data related to the issue of stunting and adolescent nutrition to create a health and nutrition awareness movement and prevent the issue of stunting and malnutrition in adolescent boys and girls.There needs to be a campaign and tagline that nutritious food does not have to be expensive. This mass campaign can be carried out together with various parties such as the Central and Regional Governments, schools, institutions, communities including traditional and religious leaders, the media, the private-sector, business, influencers as well as children.

CAN_I indicators selected and measured for Indonesia

Indonesia: Level of concern score



Nepal

What are the barriers in terms of accessibility of appropriate knowledge among children and their parents

Authors: Prashna, Sunil, Monika

Introduction:

Child hunger alongside malnutrition serves as urgent problems throughout Nepal as they threaten the basic health and developmental potential along with future prospects of Nepalese children across the entire nation. The country continues to face public health issues stemming from malnutrition among its population because rural areas and marginal communities experience high rates of stunting together with wasting and undernutrition issues. The research project on child hunger and malnutrition in Nepal started under the partnership of World Vision International (WVI) with Western Sydney University to let children take the lead in their own research. World Vision International alongside Western Sydney University has launched this initiative to gain knowledge from all relevant parties with a particular emphasis on children for understanding how they view hunger and malnutrition and these issues' impact on them.

Research Question

Considering the various aspects and underlying causes of child hunger and malnutrition, "Team Nepal" formulated a research question that served as the foundation for the research conducted. The research question is:

"What are the barriers in terms of accessibility of appropriate knowledge among children and their parents."

Key Findings

- **Lack of proper school meal programme:**

  "Children need proportional food in their diet and most schools don't give sufficient food." -male, 13. Approximately 17% (11 out of 63) of children have reported the absence of a proper school meal

programme. Although some schools do offer meal programmes, they do not provide nutritious food. Additionally, certain schools provide a monetary allowance for tiffin, which is often spent on purchasing unhealthy snacks. Furthermore, private schools in Nepal generally do not have a school meal programme, compelling students to bring processed or junk food from home.

- **Poor Financial Condition of Parents:**

  "Weak financial situation which causes families to be unable to take care of their children and themselves." -male, 16. 21% of children (13 out of 63) indicate financial instability plays a role in child hunger and malnutrition among peers. Due to scarce jobs and resulting economic problems their parents face, this becomes the primary reason behind inadequate family nourishment.

- **Agricultural culture of the country:**

  "Use of pesticides and insecticides in the vegetables that are found in the market." -female, 19. Results show that agricultural practices constitute a major cause of malnutrition according to 27% (17 out of 63) of children survey respondents. Scarcity of valuable land occurs because of the increasing trend of urban development. Farmers who practice farming usually deploy harmful insecticides and pesticides for their crops.

- **Lack of Parental Attention to Children's Nutrition Intake:**

  "Children are not getting enough care and suffering from malnutrition, not getting a balanced diet." -female, 12. 24% of children (15 out of 63) reported cases that their parents fail to observe their eating behaviors. Parents who work full-time in current society resort to fast food and junk food which results in their children missing proper nutrition. Parents provide their children with money which they typically use to purchase packaged or unhealthy products from the market.

- **Eating habit of children:**

  "Not eating home made foods, instead favoring outside foods." -male, 16. A large proportion of children- 46% (29 out of 63) indicated the high popularity of junk food among their school peers. Food containing additives delivers an appealing flavor that children tend to prefer over home-cooked meals, and also due to its available anytime and anywhere. The easy access to cheap junk food throughout the nation makes these choices for children. Children select junk food as their normal consumption option.

What we Want to See Change to Improve Nutrition for Young People in Our Country:

Young adults in Nepal experience a serious nutritional problem that affects their current wellness as well as their ability to work effectively and maintain proper quality of life. Undernutrition stands as a widespread nutritional problem mostly affecting rural and poor economic areas of Nepal. All young people in Nepal need to obtain adequate nutrition which requires specific strategies to be developed across national and regional and local levels.

- **Enhancement of Food Availability:**

  The availability of healthy food items such as fruits and vegetables together with dairy products should grow in both rural and urban communities. The government needs to support programmes which maintain regular and affordable access to nutritious foods specifically aimed at youth living in food deprived areas.

- **Poverty Alleviation:**

  Reducing the state of poverty brings out direct positive effects on nutrition of the population. The government needs to establish policies which fight poverty alongside food insecurity to enable low-income families access to nutritious food regularly.

- **Incorporation of Nutrition in School Curriculum:**

  Schools should teach nutrition through their curriculum to establish strong eating habits in students from their childhood. Students need detailed information about diet balance and their advantages, as well as nutritional expertise to acquire through educational programmes.

- **Community-based Outreach Programme:**

  Rural and remote communities need local nutrition programmes as essential components of their healthcare services. Health workers together with community leaders should conduct these programmes which teach families about nutrition education alongside cooking techniques and economical healthy food solutions.

To successfully enhance the nutritional status of young people in Nepal the proposed strategies must be correctly implemented at all local, provincial and federal levels for extensive reach and enduring benefits. Public and private organisations and governmental bodies need to join forces through multi-sectoral approaches for boosting nutrition initiatives that combat malnutrition. Nutrition programmes must become subject to continuous assessment and evaluation for measuring success alongside detecting any needed program modifications. These mutual combined efforts will create an environment which assures Nepal's youth have nutritious and secure nutrition prospects in the coming years.

Conclusion

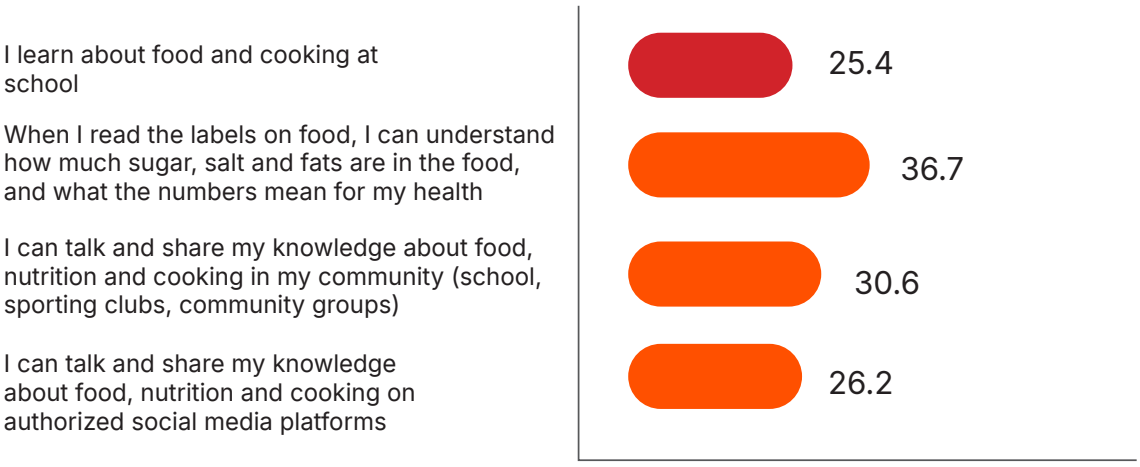
This child-led research validates participatory approaches alongside child-sensitive methods when used to obtain genuine participation and facilitate ownership from young people.

Future nutrition-related policies must consider adopting child-led methodologies because young people should be included in decisions regarding nutrition. Better relationships between child leaders and academic institutions plus development organisations will boost the quality and impact of research while generating sustainable results in child nutrition fields.

"Children are not just beneficiaries—they are capable leaders and change-makers. Their voices must be heard, valued, and acted upon in shaping a healthier future."

CAN_I indicators selected and measured for Nepal

Nepal: Level of concern score



Philippines

Barriers to Nutritious Food Access for Filipino School-Aged (10-13 years old) Children Across Communities

Authors: Mikaela, Princess, Princess

Introduction

Hunger and malnutrition among children remain pressing issues in the Philippines, particularly in urban, rural, and fragile communities. Access to nutritious food is essential for children's growth, cognitive development, and overall well-being. However, despite various government initiatives aimed at improving food security, many children still face significant barriers to obtaining healthy food. It is important to further delve into this topic so that the challenges will be determined to know why hunger and malnutrition are still prevalent even though there are existing programs and initiatives proposed and implemented by the government regarding food security.

This study explores these barriers by engaging children and stakeholders directly and analysing their experiences and insights regarding the issue. This research aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to address child malnutrition and food insecurity across communities mainly in rural, urban, and fragile communities in the Philippines

Research Question

What are the barriers experienced by school-aged children in accessing nutritious food in urban, rural, and fragile communities, considering the current priority programs and initiatives of the government on food security?

Findings

High Cost of Nutritious Food:

One of the most common issues raised by participants was the high cost of healthy food. Many children report that their families find it difficult to afford fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious options. Instead, they often rely on cheaper, less nutritious alternatives such as instant noodles, canned goods, and processed foods.

Limited Availability of Healthy Food in Some Areas:

Participants from rural and fragile communities shared that fresh and healthy food is not always available in their local stores. Instead, they mostly find processed and unhealthy food options, which limit their ability to maintain a balanced diet.

Transportation Barriers to Accessing Better Food Options:

For children living in remote areas, reaching a market or supermarket that sells fresh and nutritious food is a challenge. Some participants reported that their families must travel long distances to buy healthier food, making it both time-consuming and costly. Limited public transportation further exacerbates this issue, restricting access to essential food items.

Economic Struggles Affecting Food Choices:

Some children mentioned that their families prioritise foods that are more affordable and filling, even if they are not nutritious. This is a direct result of financial constraints, where households opt for food that can sustain them for longer rather than food that promotes long-term health.

Need for Greater Government Support:

A significant number of participants expressed the need for stronger government intervention in making healthy food more accessible and affordable. Some children suggested lowering food prices, increasing food assistance programmes, and ensuring that fresh produce is available in all communities.

Slow Dissemination of Information:

Some households struggle to receive information due to the distance from the town. Government or NGO Programmes often struggle to reach remote areas due to poor infrastructure and long travel time. As a result, residents living in these locations may miss out on important information families in remote areas where there is limited internet connectivity and week mobile signals prevent people from accessing online nutrition resources. TV or radio programmes that promote healthy habits may also not reach these areas.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the pressing issue of food insecurity among school-aged children in the Philippines, emphasising the various barriers that prevent them from accessing nutritious food. The findings reveal that economic struggles, food availability, transportation limitations, and the high cost of healthy food are significant challenges that children and their families face daily. Despite government initiatives aimed at improving food security, these barriers continue to persist, leaving many children vulnerable to malnutrition, stunted growth, and long-term health consequences.

The impact of food insecurity extends beyond hunger—it affects a child's ability to learn, grow, and develop into a healthy adult. Poor nutrition has been linked to cognitive delays, weakened immune systems, and increased susceptibility to diseases. For children in school, a lack of proper nutrition can result in lower academic performance, decreased energy levels, and difficulty concentrating in class. This cycle of malnutrition and poverty further exacerbates social inequalities, making it harder for low-income families to break free from economic hardship.

This study's findings aligned with global research on food security, reinforcing that food access and affordability are fundamental human rights, not privileges. Ultimately, securing nutritious food for all children is not just a matter of policy, it is a moral and social responsibility. A well-fed generation is a healthier, stronger, and more capable generation. By prioritising food security and implementing sustainable solutions, the Philippines can build a future where every child could grow, learn, and thrive without the burden of hunger. Access to nutritious food should not be a privilege, should be a right that every child can enjoy, regardless of their socioeconomic status or location.

Recommendation/ Call to Action

We, the CHAMP Leaders and Child-led Research team in the Philippines respectfully recommend the following to the Government, NGO's, other Agencies that support poor families across communities and families:

- **Support for Families**

  There are existing programmes that help poor families. However, some families were not given enough support. The government should provide healthy food for homeless children and families. Communities should provide food for the locals to eat, especially the community gardens must be available for everyone.

- **Widen the Focused Aged**

  Duty bearers need to extend their focused aged, children are not only those aged 1-5 years old but 0-17 years old. Every Child needs enough care, especially about nutrition and health. Adolescents are the stage where a child prepares its mind and body to be adults. They also need support for nutrition and enough food.

- **Health Aware**

  Parents must understand the importance of enough food and nutrition to the well-being of children. Especially those who live far from the town. Children must also be aware that keeping their own body is their responsibility and that they must eat healthy foods and practice healthy lifestyle. Governments should extend health and nutrition awareness across communities, especially those who live in remote areas by supporting organisations that highly advocate for healthy and wise practices for food. More children should be involved in activities and workshops that focus on hunger and malnutrition. These workshops will not only promote awareness regarding hunger and malnutrition but will also capacitate them to decide and share their ideas

- **Practicality**

  Families should make gardens at home to keep their family healthy at the same time saves expenses for food. Individuals should be taught how to conserve their food. There should be recycling bins and compost pits on the communities which will serve as an alternative fertiliser rather than using fertilisers that are produced with heavy chemicals.

- **Environmentally Friendly Food Production**

  Waste and chemicals from the factories should be disposed of properly and ensure that these harmful chemicals do not affect fish production and agriculture. Advocate farmers to use non-toxic fertilisers in agriculture, to aid global warming and climate change that affects the harvests.

- **Improved Food Distribution in Remote Areas**

  Investments in infrastructure and food supply chains should be prioritised to ensure that fresh and healthy food reaches all communities.

- **Subsidies for Local Farmers**

  Providing support to farmers can help increase the production and availability of fresh produce, making it more affordable for consumers.

CAN_I indicators selected and measured for the Philippines

Philippines: Level of concern score

Sri Lanka

How has the Economic Crisis Affected the Ability of Young People to Get Enough Healthy Food

Authors: Jeramiyan, Kujitha, Binuki

Introduction

The child-led study carried out by Child-Led Advocacy and Meaningful Participation (CHAMP) leaders from Sri Lanka, explores how the economic crisis has affected children's access to nutritious food. After facing major struggles in 2022, including severe shortages of fuel, food and medicine as well as inflation rates skyrocketing to over 70%, many families across the country were pushed into poverty. Children felt these impacts deeply, especially when it came to having enough healthy food to eat. We wanted to understand what other young people were experiencing and how the crisis changed their eating habits and access to food. Our study was conducted in Chankanai (Nothern Province), Watawala (Central Province) and Meegahakiula (Uva Province) giving us a mix of experiences from different parts of the country with inputs from children of all ethnicities, religions and abilities contributing to the data collection.

This study is more than just research, it's part of a larger effort to make sure children's voices are heard on issues like hunger and malnutrition. With support from World Vision Lanka and the guidance of the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University, we are stepping up as advocates, helping shape real solutions that affect our lives and our future.

Research Aims

- To understand how the economic crisis has changed the way children eat and whether they still have access to healthy food.
- To have children take the lead in research and advocacy by sharing our voices and ideas on hunger and malnutrition.
- To advocate our findings to our leaders in our country and in the world.

What did the young people tell us?

Findings

1. Many children frequently miss at least one meal each day and struggle to maintain a proper eating schedule. This habit is due to hectic school routines, long commutes, or lack of access to nutritious food.
2. Most children start their day with tea and biscuits, followed by junk food for evening snacks.
3. School canteens often lack a variety of healthy and nutritious food options, offering limited choices that fail to meet the dietary needs of growing children and promote balanced eating habits.
4. Child nutrition faces significant challenges, including poverty, unemployment, lack of awareness, ineffective government services, poor food quality, unhealthy lifestyle choices, environmental constraints, and inadequate educational efforts to promote healthy eating and practical cooking skills.
5. Most children's Favourite foods are influenced by the fact that they are prepared by a family member, such as their mother or father, and the sweetness of the food plays a significant role in their preference.

Finding 1:

Many children tend to skip at least one meal a day and often do not eat at the appropriate times.

There are a considerable number of children that skip meals at morning or evening. This is because they leave early to school and mostly depend on the break time to have their meals. It has been observed through the information that children consume fewer fruits in their meals. For most of them, their main meal is rice with curry but not many varieties of vegetables. Most of the children eat rice at least once a day.

Finding 2:

Most children start their day with tea and biscuits, followed by junk food for evening snacks.

Approximately 79% of children begin their day with a cup of tea, which may or may not include milk. For many, this morning ritual is accompanied by biscuits, serving as a light yet routine breakfast. Most of the children take biscuits as their primary choice of snacks. This practice holds a cultural and social significance, as it is often enjoyed in the company of family members. However, it may also highlight challenges in ensuring access to more balanced and nutritious morning meals, especially for growing children. This pattern shows the need for initiatives aimed at promoting healthier breakfast options while respecting cherished family practices.

Finding 3:

School canteens do not have healthy food options.

Most children rely on food options available at school, which include a mix of healthy and unhealthy choices. Since many children do not bring food from home, they depend on school canteens and nearby food shops for their meals. These canteens mostly offer sweet, oily, and fried items. As a result, children tend to choose convenient and quick options like buns, patties, and other short eats.

Finding 4:

School canteens do not have healthy food options.

Child nutrition faces significant challenges, including poverty, unemployment, lack of awareness, ineffective government services, poor food quality, unhealthy lifestyle choices, environmental constraints, and inadequate educational efforts to promote healthy eating and practical cooking skills.

1. Economic and Social Issues:
    - Poverty and unemployment hinder access to nutritious food.
    - Economic crises and inflation make healthy food unaffordable.
    - Lack of economic resources impacts families' ability to provide proper meals.
2. Health and Lifestyle Factors:
    - Diseases caused by malnourishment affecting children's overall health.
    - Youth neglect their diet and fail to follow proper medical advice.
    - Excessive consumption of unhealthy fast food and skipping meals (especially breakfast).
3. Food Quality Concerns:
    - Use of artificial pesticides, flavours, and colouring impacts food safety.
    - Adulteration in milk and fruits harvested with chemicals.
    - Street food is often unhealthy, but relied upon for affordability and convenience.
4. Environmental and Agricultural Challenges:
    - Heavy rains disrupt home gardening and cultivation efforts.
    - Damage caused by pests affects food supply.
5. Family and Social Dynamics:
    - Non-cooperative parents fail to promote healthy eating habits.
    - Vendors focus on selling fast food for their survival rather than prioritising healthier options.
    - Lack of proper participation in awareness campaigns from families and communities.
6. Cultural and Educational Gaps:
    - Limited nutritional education and awareness programmes for children.
    - Youth display interest in convenience foods over healthier alternatives.
    - Children are not taught practical skills, like how to prepare and cook safe, nutritious meals.

Finding 5:

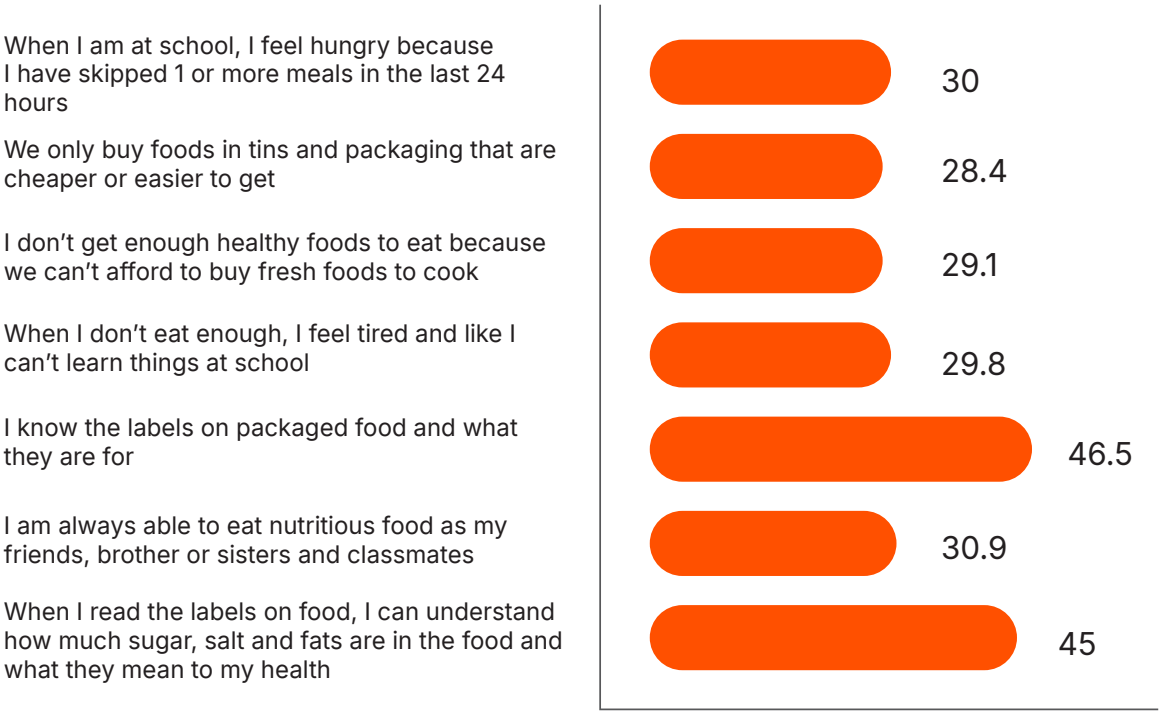
Most children's favorite foods are influenced by the fact that they are prepared by a family member, such as their mother or father, and the sweetness of the food plays a significant role in their preference.

Children's favourite foods are often shaped by the emotional connection and care embedded in meals prepared by family members, such as their mother or father. The familiarity of home-cooked meals, combined with the sweetness in the food, greatly influences their preferences and creates a sense of comfort and satisfaction. However, despite knowing the importance of consuming healthy foods, many children still tend to opt for fast food and junk food due to their appealing taste, vibrant colors, and enticing aroma.

This preference for convenience becomes even more pronounced during busy mornings, as most school children are in a rush to head out. In such situations, they often look for something quick, easy, and flavourful to eat, which commonly leads them to choose packaged snacks, sugary treats, or fried items that are readily available but lacking in nutritional value. This behavior highlights the need for practical solutions to encourage healthier eating habits, such as accessible and nutritious grab-and-go meal options that cater to children's tastes and schedules.

CAN_I indicators selected and measured for Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka: Level of concern score



CHAMP leader quotes

CHAMP leader from the Philippines, age 19:

The top three things I have learnt so far are:

1. How research can identify the underlying causes of hunger and provide insights into effective interventions.
2. The importance of choosing the right data collection methods to get valid, reliable results.
3. The process of synthesising the findings and turning them into actionable insights is more complex than I expected, but it's also one of the most rewarding parts of research.

> ***"This research has deepened my understanding of the scale of child malnutrition and the importance of evidence-based solutions in tackling this issue. It's inspiring to see how data can drive real-world change."***

CHAMP leader from Nepal, age 16:

> ***"[I want to see this research] generate new concepts, methodologies, interventions and understanding."***

> ***"I have learnt to eat healthy food in my diet, and not only for myself, but also for family and society have been drawn more attention to this matter."***

CHAMP leader from Indonesia, age 20:

This research is important to me because:

1. This is important because this research data will be very useful for the openness of nutritional access for children in the future.
2. This research is very important for me because it is to find out the most possible access to nutritious food.
3. This research will be very useful to overcome the limited access to nutritious food.

> ***"What I enjoyed about this learning process was how the teenagers (forum children) shared their experiences in terms of getting nutritious food and the realistic obstacles to afford the nutritious food in their environment."***

Action Now!

Children and young people from all five countries across the South Asia Pacific Region want to see their governments take action now to improve nutrition for them, their families and their communities. They see this as their government's top priority and responsibility.

They want governments to be active in creating food programmes in schools so that children can always access nutritious foods. They also want their Presidents, Prime Ministers and Regional Heads to be active in promoting nutrition awareness and education campaigns to communities as they worry that people are consuming unhealthy fast foods that are easily accessible.

In Bangladesh, there was a particularly strong desire to see legislative changes to implement fair pricing policies and fairer distribution of goods. Strikingly, children and youth express an awareness of the role played by governments in supporting the promotion and establishment of food and nutrition education initiatives to improve understandings of the importance of maintaining healthy diets within schools and across communities. Research outcomes by children and young people, clearly found the following actions need to be taken to create change and ensure no child goes hungry.

5 Key mobilising actions to create change

01

Promote school campaigns for healthy food options

02

Encourage home and community gardening

03

Improve awareness amongst communities to promote healthy eating habits

04

Invest in school meals programmes, including breakfast

05

Run youth community nutrition and cooking skills programmes

Conclusion

The research presented by CHAMP youth leaders across all workshops and communities in the SAP region shows that children and young people are deeply impacted by poverty and hunger. They see the daily impact of food insecurity on their peers, family, and neighbours.

Young people spoke powerfully about the inequalities they witness—some children have enough to eat, while others skip meals so siblings or parents can have food instead. Quick, processed snacks and packaged foods are often the only affordable option, replacing fresh, nutritious meals.

Through their experiences, children and young people clearly understand the structural issues that cause malnutrition. They are calling on governments to honour their basic human right of equal access to food within the home, schools and communities. They are frustrated by government inaction and are demanding systemic change to address economic instability, inflated food prices, and the lack of social protections that could ensure consistent access to quality food, especially in schools.

CHAMP leaders emphasised that food systems across the SAP region are failing. They are not equitable, sustainable, or healthy—and they are preventing children from accessing fresh, quality food. Children are especially concerned about the use of harmful pesticides and chemicals in agriculture and want to see stricter regulations, reduced contamination, and more financial support of primary producers to adopt sustainable farming practices.

Education is power. Yet, children reported limited education in schools and little understanding in homes and communities about the importance of healthy diets. Many parents struggle to provide healthy meals simply because they lack knowledge about what foods help children grow well. At the same time, fast food is heavily promoted and easily available in schools and communities. Children and young people are demanding stronger nutrition policies and better regulation of food marketing to protect their health and future.

At a time of global uncertainty, it is more important than ever to ensure that young people lead and participate meaningfully in research to inform nutrition policy. Policy must be grounded in evidence led by children and young people—and reflect their realities, priorities, and ideas for change.
The phenomenal leadership and dedication by the CHAMP leaders through this initiative, in partnership with Western Sydney University, highlights the importance of continuing to invest in child-led research. When young people research, they are not just consulted—they are empowered to shape decisions and policy development from the ground up. Through this process, one message is clear:

Governments and other actors must be held accountable to addressing the structural causes of poverty and enabling all children and young people to realise their right to food—not just any food, but food that is fresh, nutritious, and free from harmful chemicals, so they can grow and thrive.

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Appendix

- Research plans:
  - Bangladesh research plan
  - Indonesia research plan
  - Nepal research plan
  - Philippines research plan
  - Sri Lanka research plan
- ‘What is a research question?’ Worksheet
- Food and Nutrition Workshop Activity Toolkit
- Delivering Your Workshop Toolkit
- Data Translation and Analysis Toolkit
- Data analysis and coding worksheetsReflection Worksheet
- Data Entry Template
- Report Writing Template

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