



Annex: SPRING Pathways to Better Nutrition Qualitative Methods Nepal

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SPRING Project

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About SPRING

The Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project is a five-year USAID-funded Cooperative Agreement to strengthen global and country efforts to scale up high-impact nutrition practices and policies and improve maternal and child nutrition outcomes. The project is managed by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., with partners Helen Keller International, The Manoff Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Disclaimer

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Note: This annex will become part of a forthcoming final report on the SPRING Pathways to Better Nutrition (PBN) Nepal Case Study, which will provide the insights, evidence, and recommendations gleaned from this two-year mixed methods study. The methods described in this annex also underpin the set of interim PBN briefs now available on our website.

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BACKGROUND

Objectives for the qualitative research component of the Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) Pathways to Better Nutrition (PBN) Nepal case study were to—

- explore the processes through which various in-country nutrition stakeholder institutions prioritize their activities to support (financially, politically, and operationally) the rollout of the Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (MSNP)
- identify views and opinions of these stakeholders regarding the various aspects of the MSNP rollout to inform and strengthen it
- explore the perceptions of these stakeholder institutions on multi-sectoral nutrition and the MSNP
- track potential changes in the priorities over time to understand the rationales that support them and analyze their potential impact.

METHODS

The PBN case study was a mixed-method, prospective study. As an integral part of the case study research, qualitative data were collected throughout the course of the study. The primary data collection method was the structured key informant interview (KII). A Grounded Theory Approach was used to identify key themes (drivers of change) across all qualitative data (key informant interviews and focus groups discussions, weekly news content, and meeting notes). Changes in these key themes, as well as changes in understanding of the MSNP, prioritization, and financing were assessed using an innovative longitudinal grid analysis for each stakeholder group. This approach was designed to obtain a thorough understanding of the issues described in the objectives and the following key domains of inquiry for the overall case study over time:

- learning on scaling up a multi-sectoral approach
- adaptation of interventions to local context(s)
- financing of nutrition-sensitive (sector level) and nutrition-specific (within sector) activities
- long-term sustainability

The following drivers were added also, based on the emergent themes from the data:

- coordination structures and mechanisms for MSNP
- human resources for nutrition
- advocacy for nutrition and MSNP
- ownership of nutrition by all sectors
- bottom-up planning processes.

Sources

Data for the qualitative data stream came from three sources, primarily:

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** at the national level, in-depth interviews were conducted at the baseline and endline of the study, with shorter follow-up interviews occurring in between as prompted by current events. In the districts, in-depth interviews were only conducted once, early in the study period, and group feedback was collected at the end of the study to validate the baseline findings.
- **News Content Analysis:** news articles were collected from the major Nepali news outlets on a weekly basis.
- **Meeting notes and reports:** notes and/or reports were collected from most official MSNP meetings and other notable nutrition gatherings in Nepal.

Key Informant Interviews

Recruiting Key Informants

National Level

The study research questions centered on how each key stakeholder institution will prioritize the activities proposed in the MSNP and how they will be funded while the plan is being rolled out. The KIs were chosen based on the following attributes:

- They were involved in developing the MSNP or are well versed on its objectives, if not previously involved.
- They were designated MSNP focal persons within government or were in planning divisions of line ministries or Ministry of Finance and assisted with making budgetary decisions.
- They were listed as MSNP working group or committee members.
- They actively participated in or have significant influence on the implementation and financing of the MSNP.
- They were recognized technical experts and opinion leaders based on the team's knowledge.
- They were available and willing to be interviewed by the case study team.

In addition, potential KIs needed to be affiliated with one of the key nutrition stakeholder institutions in Nepal. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement categorized such institutions into six groups (SUN 2010).

- Government.
 - National Planning Commission
 - Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD)
 - Ministry of Finance (MoF)
 - Ministry of Agriculture and Development (MoAD)
 - Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD)
 - Ministry of Health (MoH)
 - Ministry of Education (MoE)

- Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MoWCSW)
 - Donor agencies (bilateral and multilateral aid agencies).
 - Civil society organizations (CSOs).
 - Business/private sector.
 - United Nation (UN) groups.
 - Academic/research institutions.

Sampling was purposive, and the sample for KIs included representatives of all six key stakeholder groups. In most cases, at least one focal person and one planning division representative were interviewed from each of the implementing line ministries named in the MSNP. The final list of KIs was determined through an iterative process between the case study team members in SPRING Home Office and Nepal.

The SPRING project's case study country staff made phone calls and visits to the offices of the final list of KIs to schedule interviews. An introduction letter from SPRING and support letter from the National Planning Commission (NPC) were delivered to the KIs to invite them to participate in the study.

District Level

District-level data were collected in three of the first six districts where the MSNP was rolled out ("prototype," or pilot, districts). These districts were selected to provide variation in geographic location, nutritional status, and the predominant nutrition-related donor project being implemented in the district. The project's case study team members in Nepal received approval of district site selection from the NPC before the district visits.

District-level KIs were representatives from five of the six key stakeholder groups noted in the National-Level section (the district sample did not include members of academia). A few modifications in the recruitment process were made to accommodate circumstances at the district level. First, all members of the District Nutrition and Food Security Steering Committee (DNFSCC) were included as KIs. These members are also MSNP Focal Persons from each of the seven line agencies involved in the MSNP rollout: District Development Council, health, agriculture, women and child development, livestock, education, and water and sanitation. Second, local representatives from the UN and key donor agency implementing nutrition programs were included in the sample: In Parsa, KIs included representatives from the World Bank's Sunaula Hazar Din project; in Achham and Kapilvastu, KIs included KIs from USAID's Suaahara project. In addition, to the extent possible, KIs included other CSOs, e.g., representatives of local NGO federations and the Civil Society Alliance for Nutrition in Nepal. Third, stakeholders from the business/private sector were contacted, e.g., representatives of the local chambers of commerce.

The study design included one village development council (VDC) per district where the MSNP is being implemented. The KIs at the VDC were members of the Village Nutrition and Food Security Steering Committee (VNFSSC).

Basic Information about Key Informants

National Level

Continual data collection was used for national interviewing. A total of 42 national-level KII were conducted during the case study’s baseline, and the numbers of individuals tracked increased to 44 by the end of the study. Follow-up interviews were triggered by information in the weekly news analysis and meeting notes. Due to changes of personnel in the government and other stakeholder groups, some KIs who had been interviewed in the baseline did not serve the same role throughout the course of this prospective study. Therefore, the case study followed the incumbents of the “positions,” not the individual KIs. The number of in-depth and follow-on interviews over the course of the study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Key Informant Interviews – National Level

| | Government sector | Donor agency | UN group | CSO | Private sector | Research | Total |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------|-----|----------------|----------|-----------|
| Baseline Interviews | 21 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 42 |
| Follow Up (Q1) | 7 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | 13 |
| Follow Up (Q2) | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Follow Up (Q3) | 25 | - | 2 | - | - | 1 | 28 |
| Follow Up (Q4)* | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | 3 |
| Follow Up (Q5) | 26 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 27 |
| Endline Interviews | 25 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 44 |

*data collection was suspended for one month during this quarter due to earthquake

District and VDC Levels

Data collection at the district and VDC level occurred just once, in early 2015. A total of 55 district-level KIIs were conducted, with an additional 30 KIIs conducted at the VDC level. Tables 2a and 2b provide a breakdown of the interviews by group.

Table 2a. Key Informant Interviews – District Level

| | Government sector | Donor agency | UN group | CSO | Private sector | Research | Total |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------|-----|----------------|----------|-----------|
| Achham | 10 | - | 3 | 7 | 1 | - | 21 |
| Kapilvastu | 14 | - | 1 | 4 | 1 | - | 20 |
| Parsa | 12 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | 14 |
| | | | | | | | 55 |

Table 2b. Key Informant Interviews – VDC Level

| | Government sector | Donor agency | UN group | CSO | Private sector | Research | Total |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------|-----|----------------|----------|-----------|
| Achham | 8 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 9 |
| Kapilvastu | 6 | - | - | 2 | - | - | 8 |
| Parsa | 9 | - | - | 4 | - | - | 13 |
| | | | | | | | 30 |

Key Informant Interview Tools

The NPC supported the national- and district-level KIIs by providing introduction letters. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of John Snow, Inc. and the IRB of the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) approved the research protocol and the national KII guide.

National Level

The national KII guide for baseline data collection was developed to capture information related to the study objectives. The national KII guide included four sections: knowledge of and current responsibilities related to MSNP rollout; processes and rationales to identify and budget for selected priority activities to implement MSNP; perceptions of scaling up nutrition and its realization in Nepal through MSNP; and budgeting processes. Due to the differences in the functions that each stakeholder group assumes in support of the MSNP, a core body of questions was developed that applies to all groups. Specific questions were developed to ask each group of stakeholders about its unique contribution to the MSNP. Six sets of KII guides were developed, all following a similar structure.

The draft KII guide went through several rounds of deliberations and revisions among the case study team and the consultants. It was pilot-tested with a national nutrition leader in-country to assess the clarity and appropriateness of the questions, as well as the time required to complete all the questions. The KII guide was then finalized after the inputs and feedback from the pilot test were incorporated.

For follow-up interviewing, we used a semi-structured approach with usually three to five questions about a current event or budget activity. The design of the KII tool at endline followed a reiterative process, similar to that in the baseline, to ensure that the questions asked were relevant to KIs from all stakeholder institutions and closely related to the overall research questions of the case study.

The national endline KII guide included seven sections:

- knowledge of and current responsibilities related to MSNP rollout
- prioritization and budget processes
- influences on prioritization and budgeting processes
- perceptions on implementation
- coordination
- sustainability
- M&E and financial data reporting for MSNP.

Additional questions about specific events or themes identified throughout the case study for particular sectors were added to the KII guide at the endline.

District Level

For the district level, the KII guide adopted the overall structure of the national KII guide. Modifications were made to fit the MSNP and the SUN movement within the local context. The district KI guide was divided into five sections:

- current nutrition programs in the district and their funding sources
- understanding of the MSNP and its objectives
- identifying, prioritizing, and planning activities under MSNP
- district coordination and implementation of MSNP
- perceptions of scaling up.

News Content Analysis

A set of media/news sources were searched retrospectively each week using a set of search terms to follow the same stakeholder groups, related organizations, and events. Four **primary sources** were searched:

- The Kathmandu Post
- The Himalayan Times
- My Republica
- Kantipur

The **search terms** used to find relevant articles were: Nutrition, Health, Agriculture, Food Security, Water and Sanitation, Education, Earthquake, Budget, NPC, MoF, MoFALD, MoAD, MoHP¹. MoWCSW, MoUD. MoE, Achham, Kapilvastu and Parsa. If, in the weekly research meetings, specific projects or events were mentioned, those titles were also used in that week's search.

News articles were captured by the research analyst if they met specific inclusion criteria. These articles were summarized and presented for discussion with the entire case study team on a weekly basis. The qualitative analyst included the news articles in the master NVivo file for analysis and/or marked for use to guide follow-up with KIs.

Inclusion criteria:

- Mentions anything about the MSNP
- Mentions nutrition in any of the official policy or annual/multi-year plan for one of the key study sectors

¹ now MoH

- Mentions nutrition-related initiatives in one of the sectors above, or a major shift in ministry priorities
- Mentions developments in national (government-wide) budgets/finances concerning each of the above areas by the key study sectors
- Mentions flow of funding from national level to regions/districts/localities
- Mentions any major event that may have an impact on the budget or priorities of one of the sectors listed above (examples include natural events impacting food, agriculture, or access to public services such as the earthquake)

Table 3 shows the tallies of the news articles included in the final analysis, broken down by month and related stakeholder group. A total of 281 articles were included.

Table 3. Summary of News Article Collection for PBN Case Study – Aggregated by Month, with Relevant Stakeholder Groups Starred

| | Government sector | Donor agency | UN group | CSO/CBOs | Private sector | Research | Total |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|------------|
| June 2014 | * | * | | * | | * | 12 |
| July 2014 | * | * | | | * | * | 12 |
| August 2014 | * | * | | | * | | 14 |
| September 2014 | * | * | | * | | | 13 |
| October 2014 | * | * | * | * | | | 16 |
| November 2014 | * | * | * | * | * | | 16 |
| December 2014 | * | | * | * | * | * | 16 |
| January 2015 | * | | | | | * | 12 |
| February 2015 | * | | * | * | | | 5 |
| March 2015 | * | * | | * | * | | 7 |
| April 2015 | * | * | * | * | | | 17 |
| May 2015 | * | * | | | | * | 19 |
| June 2015 | * | * | * | * | | * | 22 |
| July 2015 | * | * | * | * | * | * | 70 |
| August 2015 | * | * | * | * | | | 19 |
| September 2015 | * | * | * | | | | 9 |
| October 2015 | * | * | | | | | 2 |
| Total | | | | | | | 281 |

Document Analysis

Three types of documents, in addition to published news, were collected continually throughout the study and used to identify changes regarding MSNP implementation and staffing. . These documents were:

- **Meeting notes:** Official meeting notes were collected for MSNP and nutrition-related meetings, including MSNP working group meetings, NNFSS coordination committee meetings, MSNP review workshops, annual meeting of the Nepal Nutrition Foundation, meetings and workshops organized by CSAAN, and a few sector review meetings.
- **Key documents:** New or modified documents of MSNP-related strategies and implementation plans were obtained and cited as needed for evidence of change in policy, plans, or implementation approach.
- **Event documentation:** These events included workshops, nutrition-related conferences, MSNP working group meetings, and fora that discuss MSNP. Where possible, the SPRING in-country team participated in these events, took notes, and obtained related materials (such as meeting minutes or presentation slides). Documents were summarized and presented at weekly staff meetings; inclusion of documents was agreed upon using the same inclusion criteria as the news content listed above.

Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

Collection

The SPRING project conducted the baseline national interviews in July 2014 in Kathmandu. Follow-up interviews were scheduled throughout the case study timeline at the national level; endline interviews were conducted at the national level between October and December 2015.

District and VDC interviews were collected in Parsa, Achham, and Kapilvastu from February to April 2015. The timing for the district interviews was delayed at the request of donors and government officials, to allow for MSNP activities to begin in these districts. Due to the earthquake and blockade, this study modified its approach in the districts – this resulted in a cross-sectional dataset for the districts.

Since the national study was longitudinal, we acknowledge that the district results will not provide as complete or up to date a picture as the rest of the study. The team conducted a rapid validation of the results in three case districts in February 2016 and March 2016 to identify what, if any, of the conclusions from the 2015 data were no longer reflective of the current situation in those districts.

All national- and district-level KIIs were scheduled to occur in the KIIs' offices and lasted for 30 to 80 minutes. The support letter from the NPC was presented to every KI at the national level. Each KI was asked to sign a written informed consent form giving the case study team permission to 1) ask the KI questions and 2) record the conversation. In the baseline national interviews, all but two KIIs agreed to be interviewed, and slightly more declined to be recorded. In the endline national interviews, none of the KIIs refused to be interviewed and only 16 percent declined to be recorded.

All signed consent forms were kept in a safe place and submitted to the IRB of the NHRC upon the completion of the data collection.

When permission was granted, the interviews were recorded with a Sony MP3 Portable Digital Voice Recorder (Model ICD-PX333 and 312). In addition, the case study team and consultants took notes in English.

Processing

Notes from KIIs were reviewed on the day of the interviews. All hand written notes were typed up within days of the interviews. The interviews were carried out in English and Nepali, or a mix of Nepali and English. At the district and village levels, the majority of interviews were conducted in Nepali, with some in Hindi (in Parsa and Achham) and English. Recordings were directly translated (if applicable) and transcribed into English. The recording was erased from the recorder once it was transferred to a computer for transcription. The file was permanently deleted from the computer once the transcription of notes was completed. For interviews that did not have accompanying recordings, notes from each of the case study team members present for the interview were consolidated and finalized. The full notes were transcribed verbatim and prepared in Microsoft Word documents. Each KI was assigned a code in the notes and transcripts. The codes and the transcripts/notes were stored in a folder on the SPRING project's central portal that is only accessible to authorized case study team members.

News sources and documents were copied and pasted into Microsoft Word documents, when possible (if a PDF or PowerPoint document, this was not possible). Each news source or document was identified by date published or by date of personal communication; if available, a URL link to the original source was provided. All news sources and documents are stored in a folder on the SPRING project's central portal.

Analysis

Transcripts, notes, news sources, and documents were uploaded and processed in NVivo 10 (QSR International, Australia). The SPRING project adopted the grounded theory approach to allow the key themes to emerge from the transcripts and notes (Lingard, Albert, and Levinson 2008). During the initial review of the transcripts/notes, special attention was paid to emerging themes that were most aligned with the case study's primary concerns about the prioritization and funding of activities for the rollout of MSNP, and with the key domains of the case study.

To generate themes, the research team met weekly; they discussed the information collected (or interviews transcribed), determined the relevance of the information to the research questions, and created action items for events that the research team needed to further investigate. The data streams served as probes for information or reactions during interviews. Research team members read through selected interviews and shared overall impressions from these discussions.

Initial codes (i.e., master nodes for coding in NVivo 10) were first identified after the baseline KI notes were reviewed. The case study team then discussed and determined the key themes of the technical briefs for the case study, which informed the codes created for analysis, including sub-nodes. These additional codes and sub-nodes were developed according to either the existing conceptual framework

or themes emerging from the data, and were only added after discussion and consensus across the qualitative research team. A codebook was created to define the codes and sub-nodes. The coding was performed by a qualitative analyst and reviewed by the qualitative lead of the case study team.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Qualitative research methods have unique strengths and are appropriate to study a small number of cases in depth. They are also appropriate to describe and explain a complex process, such as implementing a country's scaled-up nutrition plan. For a longitudinal case study, qualitative methods have the flexibility to be responsive to changes in the field, improving the utility of the findings and recommendations through adaptation of data collection instruments and analysis. Asking the same questions of different individuals helps uncover discrepancies in facts and sequences, triangulate information to reach a consensus, and collect views and opinions—which could be divergent—on the implementation of national rollout. Such an exercise will reveal insights about why things are moving or not and indicate potential resolutions to challenges in the rollout.

Some general weaknesses of qualitative research also applied in this case study, namely that the study had a small sample size and was relatively resource intensive. Perhaps the weakness of greatest concern was that the results may not be directly generalizable to the other countries. The case study has tried to align reporting of findings to issues that can be applicable in other countries. SPRING also did a cluster analysis of other countries with similar nutrition governance, income, and socio-demographic characteristics, to identify where these findings may or may not have cross-country applicability.

The strengths and limitations of the quantitative portion of this study are addressed in the Budget Methods Annex and Snapshot Methods Annex. Please see www.spring-nutrition.org for these documents.

Due to changes of personnel in the government and other stakeholder groups, some KIs who had been interviewed in the baseline did not serve the same role throughout the course of this prospective study. As such, the case study interviewed the incumbents of the “positions,” not the individual KIs. The in-country case study researchers were active members in the country's nutrition community and they closely observed the personnel changes of KI positions so that follow-up interviews could be scheduled with the right individuals. With any new interviewee, the same procedures were followed regarding introduction letters and the signing and filing of consent forms. If in-country staff members identified new funding or activities over the course of the study through the other data streams, KIs from new organizations were also interviewed.

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