

Nutrition financing in Pakistan: Mapping advocacy needs at the country level

Overview of nutrition situation in Pakistan

Despite some progress, Pakistan still struggles with high rates of malnutrition and around 7.9 million people (22% of the population) face high levels of acute food insecurity. The most recent [National Nutrition Survey](#) conducted in 2018 presented some alarming trends. The prevalence of wasting in children aged under 5 years is 17.7% (a total of 4.9 million children), above the global emergency threshold of 15%, and over 40% of children aged under 5 years are stunted (almost 11.5 million children). More than half are anaemic (14.94 million children) and suffering from micronutrient deficiencies. Only 38% of children are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life.

KEY DOCUMENTS

Multisectoral National Nutrition Action Plan (MSNNAP) for Pakistan (2023-2030)

National Advocacy Strategy for Scaling Up Nutrition (2019-2025)

[National Vision for Reproductive Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition \(RMNCAH&N\) 2016–2025](#)

Pakistan Gender Policy Framework (2022)

[Pakistan Global Action Plan on Wasting](#)

Pakistan UN Food Systems Summit national pathways

Pakistan's nutrition financing landscape

Coordination mechanisms to address malnutrition and food insecurity involve multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and community-based groups. In Pakistan, the health and nutrition sectors are decentralized, allowing provinces to develop their own strategies, which are then consolidated into a national framework

Provincial Planning and Development Departments are responsible for nutrition budgeting, while various departments oversee the implementation of nutrition interventions. The Health Department and Provincial Directorate of Nutrition implement nutrition-specific interventions, whereas nutrition-sensitive interventions are carried out by relevant departments such as education, social protection, agriculture, and local government (for WASH interventions) at the sub-national level.

Development partners remain the predominant financiers of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) treatment, with UNICEF mobilizing resources for ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF) primarily through humanitarian funds. Pakistan also utilises [UNICEF's matched funding Child Nutrition Fund](#), for improving maternal nutrition through mobilising Lady Health Workers to reach millions of pregnant women with essential health services. The World Food Programme supports Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) treatment by providing ready-to-use supplementary foods (RUSF).

The Government of Pakistan has identified 62 high burden neglected districts, and there are currently 32 multisectoral projects in place, representing a total commitment of US\$2.7 billion between 2021 and 2026 in line with the country's 2021 N4G commitments. Funding under the [Pakistan Nutrition Initiative \(PANI\)](#), launched in 2024, allocates a further US\$30 million funding for child malnutrition programmes in 30 high-burden districts. This money has been included in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) and should be released in the 2025/26 fiscal year. The [Benazir Income Support Programme Nashonuma](#) (US\$150,000), has introduced conditional cash transfers to address stunting in high-risk pregnant mothers and children (first 1,000 days) through provision of additional cash for BISP beneficiaries.

Nutrition financing gaps

The **total estimated budget** required from 2023/24 to 2029/30 for implementing the nutrition objectives of the MNNSAP is **PKR 1,788.04 billion**, with a budget requirement of **PKR 227.90 billion** for the **2025/26 fiscal year**. No systematic analysis of funding gaps for both nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions has been done at the national level. One [economic analysis conducted in Sindh Province](#) estimated funding gaps of around 75 per cent for all nutrition programming.

Nutrition financing in Pakistan: Mapping advocacy needs at the country level

The MNNSAP identifies a lack of policy-based financing at the national level, with a clear disconnect between nutrition-related policy and budgeting. None of the government's sectoral plans currently link policy to public sector budgetary decisions or to sectoral work and budget plans or any kind of resource mobilization initiative. The National Nutrition PC-1 was an attempt to align and access funding for specific nutrition interventions that are also priorities in policies and strategies, but this has not yet been approved.

There is often **insufficient resource mobilization** for nutrition from both domestic and external sources due to under-prioritization by policymakers, lack of coordinated donor engagement and funding disbursement delays. Nutrition is only reliably prioritized by policymakers in short-term humanitarian crises (Source: SUN Pakistan workshop).

Pakistan's advocacy priorities for nutrition financing

The immediate priority is focused on operationalizing the costed MSNAP and the approval and timely release of the budget for PANI. Other key actions to improve nutrition financing are recommended in the National Advocacy Strategy for Scaling Up Nutrition and identified by Pakistan stakeholders from a [SUN Pakistan workshop on "Pathways to sustainable nutrition financing"](#) (in December 2024). These include:

- 1 Advocate for **establishing a nutrition financing baseline** through budget analysis and stakeholder engagement
- 2 Push for **adequate allocation of funds for nutrition in national and provincial budgets** (reflecting nutrition priorities and goals), timely approval of **PC-1/programmes** and efficient fund utilization
- 3 Develop a comprehensive **plan for nutrition resource mobilization** (at national and provincial levels), including domestic, external, and new and innovative financing sources
- 4 **Enhance coordination among government entities** at national, provincial and local levels to ensure **efficient planning, allocation, and utilization of nutrition budgets**. This includes streamlining communication, clarifying roles and improving accountability mechanisms to prevent delays and inefficiencies in nutrition expenditure management.
- 5 Set up a **provincial system to tag and track nutrition expenditures utilising AI** to understand the nutrition financing gaps and strengthen accountability systems. Conduct periodic budget reviews to track spending on nutrition
- 6 Build capacity for nutrition-related public finance management among relevant provincial employee to cost nutrition programmes effectively
- 7 Develop evidence-based reports and policy briefs to guide decision-making

Advocacy support needs: Specific requests from Pakistan

1 Capacity-building and technical support

- Training on budget and expenditure tracking using AI and digital tools
- Strengthening data-driven decision-making for nutrition financing

2 Resource mobilization for nutrition

- Support in identifying unfunded priorities within the MSNAP to ensure targeted advocacy and resource mobilization
- Support in developing a nutrition financing resource mobilization strategy
- Guidance on engaging multilateral and bilateral donors for increased investment
- Identifying and advocating for sustainable domestic funding mechanisms

3 Advocacy and policy engagement

- Development of policy briefs and advocacy materials for sensitizing parliamentarians and policymakers
- Use of data visualization and real-life case studies to strengthen advocacy efforts
- Capacity-building for civil society organizations (CSOs) to advocate for increased nutrition financing

4 Global advocacy support

- Leveraging the global advocacy community to highlight Pakistan's nutrition financing needs on international platforms
- Connecting country stakeholders with potential donors and technical partners
- Advocacy for aligning global funding commitments with Pakistan's high burden of malnutrition