

Action brief

CSOs' role in advancing nutrition accountability and making nutrition a priority during emergencies in Pakistan

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Country: Pakistan

Themes: Social mobilization, advocacy and communication

Sub-themes: Engaging nutrition champions to position nutrition as a priority at all levels
Engaging civil society

Date: 2023



Overview



In Pakistan, where the economy is frail and more than 40 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line, many people are at risk of hunger and malnutrition.

The country is increasingly exposed and vulnerable to various natural hazards, including floods, cyclones, droughts and earthquakes. Disasters have caused significant loss of life, economic damage and reversal of development gains over the past 15 years. The recent floods in Pakistan impacted more than 30 million people directly and submerged a third of the country – a major crisis, given that half of the population depends on agriculture and livestock.

And that is to say nothing of the COVID-19 pandemic and its dramatic effects on food systems. The economic

slowdown, shocks and floods have affected poorer communities disproportionately, limiting access to adequate, safe and nutritious food for households.



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Objectives of the action brief

This action brief aims to highlight the food and nutrition security issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent floods in Pakistan and the advocacy that was done to address the issues.



Period covered

The initiatives and actions covered in this action brief were undertaken between August 2020 and June 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak, and from August 2022, when floods hit the country, to the present. The SUN Civil Society Alliance and civil society organizations (CSOs) shifted their focus to provide emergency relief services to communities and advocate with the Government to prioritize nutrition in its emergency response strategy.



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What action was taken?

SUN CSA members and CSOs have always been involved and engaged in emergency relief and response, but the difference is that when the pandemic and floods hit the country, the CSOs integrated nutrition into their relief and response initiatives.

The CSOs worked closely with national, provincial and district disaster management authorities and local governments in disaster-hit areas, advocating for the inclusion of nutrition in the relief response work – including through nutritionally balanced ration packages for affected communities; the use of fortified wheat, oil and salt; and proper water and sanitation facilities.

The initiatives resulted in an increased understanding among stakeholders of the significance of nutrition during emergencies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, federal and provincial government leaders devised nutrition-sensitive response strategies that kept nutrition a priority at the policy and implementation levels.

Continuous advocacy with all relevant stakeholders – particularly engagement with parliamentarians to prioritize nutrition during emergencies – was raised at a regional

seminar for the Asia-Pacific Region Parliaments on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, hosted by the National Assembly of Pakistan.

Among the many other initiatives undertaken by the SUN CSA in Pakistan and its members:

- Strengthening the capacities of members on such topics as nutrition-sensitive emergency response initiatives, responsibilities during emergencies, the multisectoral approach for COVID-19 resilience, and nutritionally balanced ration packages for emergencies
- Webinar showcasing the work of CSOs during emergencies and providing an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning
- Distribution of nutritionally balanced ration packages
- Development of booklet on nutrition-sensitive COVID-19 messages for dissemination among communities
- Support for the Government and development partners in their efforts to reach vulnerable and affected



communities during the pandemic and floods. CSA members pooled their own resources to support affected populations to safeguard food and nutrition security in far-flung and vulnerable areas.

- Support for the Government flagship social protection programme, especially in reaching vulnerable and affected communities with ration distribution and cash transfers
- Letter to the Ministry of National Health Services to discourage breast-milk substitutes and to the Ministry of Social protection for the provision of fortified wheat, oil and salt in ration distribution initiatives
- Provision of food, clean drinking water, medicine, hygiene kits, cash grant assistance, dietary supplements, vegetable seeds for kitchen gardening, farming tools, poultry and more
- Media campaign to raise awareness about protecting and strengthening the nutritional status of vulnerable population groups, including women

Lesson Learned

- Improved emergency preparedness and response with nutrition integration is crucial for managing emergencies and mitigating their impacts on health and nutrition. Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders are essential for effective response and recovery efforts.
- Addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, such as poverty and limited access to basic services, is important for long-term resilience.
- Incorporating a gender-sensitive approach in emergency responses can help address the unique needs and challenges faced by women and girls during natural disasters.
- Investments in disaster-resilient infrastructure and health systems can help mitigate the impact of floods on health and nutrition.





What would the country do differently?

It was difficult to keep nutrition a priority amid the more pressing issues of emergency relief and rehabilitation.

It also was difficult to address the expectations of partners, including the Government and SUN CSA members, related to financial support for emergency relief activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Adaptation and Applicability

- **Develop a focused strategy regarding key areas of intervention in the event of an emergency.**
- **Strengthen the capacities of CSOs to integrate nutrition in the different initiatives.**
- **Analyse the Government's disaster management strategy and plan.**
- **Develop and disseminate nutritionally balanced ration guidelines with locally available food to all relevant stakeholders, as well as sensitization on the subject.**
- **Foster engagement with disaster management authorities at national and subnational levels to integrate nutrition in their preparedness, relief, recovery and response plans.**
- **Develop community sensitization awareness materials tailored to the local context.**



Next steps

- Continue advocacy efforts with policymakers for constitutional amendments to make food and nutrition security a fundamental right so people's access to food and nutrition can be ensured, particularly during an emergency.
- Advocate with the Government and other stakeholders to include nutrition in emergency preparedness plans.
- Follow up with relevant stakeholders for the institutionalization of nutritionally balanced ration guidelines during emergencies.
- Strengthen the capacities of members to enhance their approaches to integrating nutrition into initiatives during emergency relief, response and recovery work.



Further information



Guidelines-Nutritionally Balanced Ration in Emergency

This Good Practice was developed in collaboration with the SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN). For more information about the SUN CSN, please visit their website: <https://www.suncivilsociety.com/>



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