

Afghanistan

November 2020

COVID 19 snapshot:

COVID 19 pandemic has greatly affected Afghanistan's health, economy and social life due to existing vulnerability, weak health system, poverty and limited capacity to deal with such a devastating global disaster.

The first confirmed COVID-19 case in Afghanistan was identified in February 22, 2020 by Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) surveillance system and the total number of confirmed cases has reached to around 40,000 by November, 2020.

As a result, the Nutrition situation in Afghanistan has been deteriorated during 2020. The analysis of Nutrition Cluster and the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020 show that out of the almost 7 million children aged under-five in Afghanistan, around 3.1m or almost 1 in 2 are acutely malnourished and in need of live saving treatment services. Similarly, out of some 3.2 million pregnant and lactating women (PLW) in Afghanistan, some 725,000 are undernourished, meaning 1 in 4 PLW in Afghanistan require treatment services to recover from malnutrition. With COVID-19 showing no signs of slowing down, care-seeking behavior and admission to health facilities has been reduced. We assume the negative impact of COVID, deteriorated the nutrition situation of children and women.

In response to the COVID 19 outbreak, MoPH had developed a National Response Plan for COVID 19 in April 2020 aiming to protect people from COVID 19 and mitigate its negative consequences. The focused areas of the plan were surveillance, management of infected persons, prevention and control measures, health promotion, coordination and resource mobilization, logistic support for response and minimize negative consequences on the delivery of health services and prioritization of essential health services during the response. This plan included short- and long-term measures prevent and effectively respond to the outbreak. The AFSeN-A technical secretariat conducted a review of MoPH (government) response plan for the COVID-19. The objective of this analysis was to look how food security and nutrition is addressed in this plan. AFSeN-A technical secretariat coordinated with the stakeholders to share their views and recommendations for improvement of a multi-sectoral response plan. According to our review, the plan is solely focusing on prevention and treatment of COVID-19, but it lacks intervention to address social and economic impact of this pandemic and lack focus on nutrition and food security.

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has also social, economic and food security consequences in addition to health, we have highlighted the need of having a high-level multisectoral committee that coordinates and discusses technical and operational level for a comprehensive response addressing the health, nutrition, social and economic impact of COVID 19. To prevent and protect further deterioration of nutrition status of

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mothers and children, we have suggested prioritize specific food security and nutrition interventions.

High prevalence of different forms of malnutrition among children and women and the negative consequences of the current COVID-19 pandemics further increase nutritional vulnerability of those who were already vulnerable to malnutrition and food insecurity.

Under the AFSeN-A, during the initial phases, messages and interviews were conducted on importance of good nutrition and food security

Institutional transformations in 2019 - 2020

1. Bringing people together into a shared space for action

The Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A) has made significant progress in the past years. So far, around (40) members and networks including government, UN agencies, donors, civil society, private sector, and academia are mobilized around AFSeN-A. Seven (7) national level multisectoral platforms (MSPs) and twenty-eight (28) provincial food security and nutrition committees have been established.

AFSeN-A has been successful bringing people together for a shared action. The following national-level governance structure were functional in 2020

1. High-Level Food Security and Nutrition Steering Committee chaired by Chief Executive Officer, honorable Dr. Abdullah Abdullah which is a high-level decision-making forum
2. Food Security and Nutrition Executive Committee chaired by CEO and Director General of the Council of Ministers' Secretariat and co-chaired by MAIL, MoPH and one UN agency on rotational basis
3. Food Security and Nutrition Developing Partners Working Group.
4. Food Security Working Group chaired by Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)
5. Nutrition Working Group chaired by MoPH
6. Advocacy and Public Awareness Working Group chaired by Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC)
7. Food Security and Nutrition Civil Society Alliance

In addition to the national AFSeN-A governance structures, Provincial Food Security and Nutrition Committees have been established to engage local authorities and non-

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governmental stakeholders to actively articulate and coordinate the AFSeN-A at the provincial level.

In addition to the above-mentioned forums, we are in the process of establishing the following networks:

- Parliamentarian Caucus - Comprises of selected MPs from lower and upper house.
- Business Network - Comprises of selected men and women chambers and business entities
- Youth Network - Comprises of selected youth association, organizations, and advocates
- Academia Network - Comprises of selected Universities, institutions, and educational centers both public and private

Members in these platforms discuss policies, strategies, programs, actions, challenges, and opportunities in food security, food safety and nutrition sectors. They act, share information, suggest recommendations and advocate for more and efficient use of resources. MSPs provide a unique opportunity to ensure that actions are implemented, resources are well managed, and stakeholders are held accountable across multiple sectors for the shared objectives.

The National level structures and platforms focus on legal, policy, strategic, financial and core technical aspects while the provincial level is concerned mainly about coordination and implementation of interventions.

2. Ensuring a coherent policy and legal framework

As part of the political will and commitment of the leadership of the GoIRA to multisectoral efforts on food security and nutrition following the recent post presidential elections' changes in the government, and to sustain the great achievements made so far by the AFSeN-A, His Excellency, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan instructed its Administrative Office to transfer the Technical Secretariat of the AFSeN-A to its structure which was hosted by the Chief Executive Office from October 2017- until April 2020.

AFSeN-A has been actively involved and leads policy and legislation reviews. Here are a few examples which were undertaken by AFSeN-A MSP platforms:

- Public Awareness through social media and TV interview
- Awareness and sensitization of policymakers through sensitization sessions for technical staff, teachers, religious scholars
- Follow up of ratification of food fortification regulation

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- Endorsement of the food safety and control authority by the Council of Ministers and the Cabinet of the GoIRA
- Policy reviews and school curriculum revision
- Assessment of SMART food in Afghanistan and preparing a list of SMART food for the country with the support of FAO.

3. Aligning actions around common results

The AFSeN-A Strategic Plan is a road map for all the food security and nutrition related actions/interventions in the country. It spells out the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government stakeholders and identifies coordination structures at the central level and at the subnational level for achieving a common goal.

4. Financing tracking a resource mobilization

AFSeN-A Technical Secretariat has conducted a costing exercise of the food security and nutrition activities of the AFSeN-A Strategic Plan in 2019. That is a good document for Afghan government and its partners can understand better what resources are required to conduct the activities in the plan. However, there are challenges such as lack of financial tracking system for funding for food security and nutrition activities, very low allocation of budget for nutrition activities from government budget (most of the nutrition interventions are dependent of donor funding) and lack of sustainable/long-term allocation of funding for nutrition.

2020 – 2021 priorities

- Adapting the multisectoral coordination architecture to recent developments in GoIRA
- Institutionalization of AFSeN-A Technical Secretariat into the Government Structure
- Extension of or a new MoU between Administrative Office of the President and UN agencies for extension of technical and financial support for the AFSeN-A Technical Secretariat.
- Establishment of Parliamentarian Caucus
- Advocacy around the Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) and Humanitarian Development Nexus studies
- Adopting the framework of Global Action Plan for Wasting for the Afghanistan and development of a multi-stakeholder common implementation plan.