



# PAKISTAN PROGRAMS

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## NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL IN PAKISTAN

Almost half of women and children in Pakistan are undernourished. As many as 40% of children under five are stunted, 18% are wasted, and up to 14% of women and adolescent girls are underweight while 7% of women are overweight and obese. Micronutrient deficiencies exist across the board, with as many as half of children under five anaemic and vitamin A-deficient, with similar rates among women, adolescent girls, and pregnant women. Iron, zinc and calcium deficiencies are also strikingly high among all population groups.

For more than two decades, Nutrition International has been working in Pakistan to improve the health of people in vulnerable situations, especially women and children, through better nutrition. Our priorities focus on improving access to micronutrients, from micronutrient supplementation and food fortification to policy changes and advocacy efforts. In addition, Nutrition International works closely with federal and provincial governments to strengthen nutrition policy and improve multisectoral coordination through the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) movement.

Over the years, our work has been supported through the generous support of the Government of Canada, the United Kingdom's Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, the World Food Programme, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other organizations.



## PRIORITY PROGRAMS AND GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

Nutrition International Pakistan will aim to achieve the following key and complementary strategic objectives by 2024:

- Improve and sustain the coverage of vitamin A supplementation (VAS) for children under five
- Increase the coverage and utilization of zinc supplements and low-osmolarity oral rehydration salts (LO-ORS) in the management of childhood diarrhoea
- Ensure that young girls, pregnant women, mothers and children aged 6-24 months residing in remote rural areas are reached with improved nutrition and healthcare
- Improve effectiveness of the national and provincial universal salt iodization (USI) programs, improve the quality and increase the quantity of adequately iodized salt produced by medium-scale salt processors, and enhance the functionality of provincial food authorities to enable effective enforcement of adequately iodized salt
- Improve the capacity of SUN countries to design, deliver and track the progress of nutrition programs and to generate, learn from and adopt knowledge of what works
- Reach 56 million people with fortified wheat flour and improve the levels of iron, vitamin B12, and folic acid among women, adolescent girls, and children
- Sustain and institutionalize edible oil fortification to reach more than 148 million people with fortified edible oil/ghee and decrease rates of vitamins A and D deficiency among women, adolescent girls and children under five

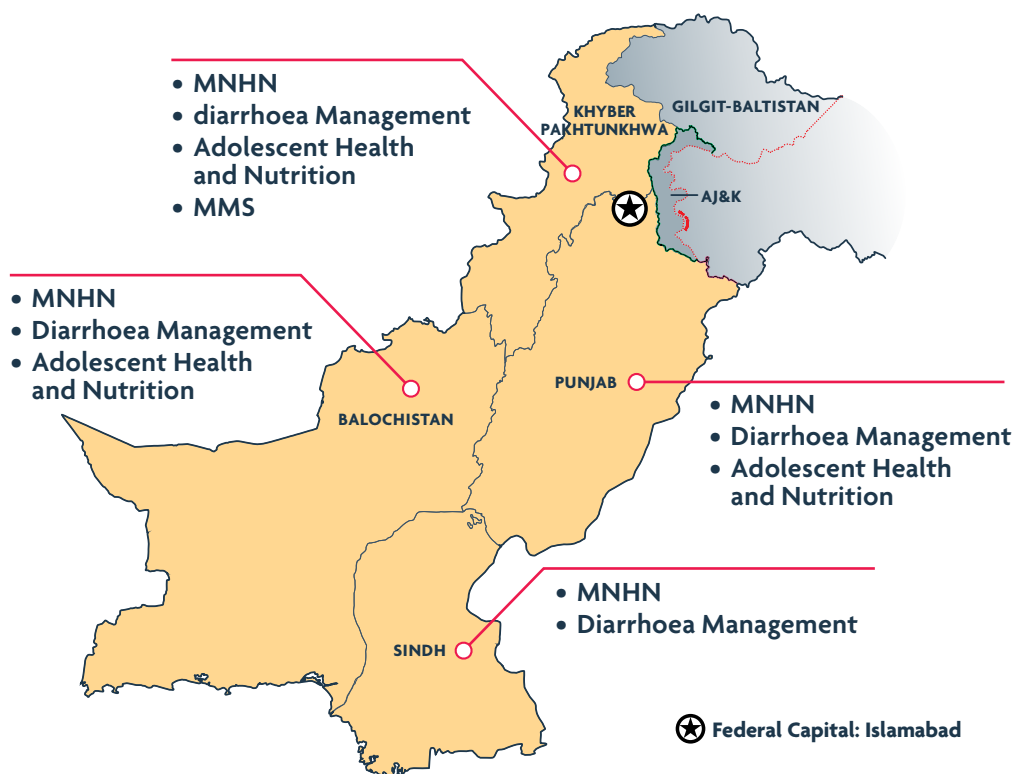
### Nutrition International's work in Pakistan

#### National programs supported by Nutrition International

- Universal salt iodization (USI)
- Wheat flour fortification
- Edible oil fortification
- Vitamin A supplementation (VAS)

#### Subnational programs supported by Nutrition International

- Maternal and newborn health and nutrition (MNHN)
- Diarrhoea management
- Adolescent health and nutrition
- Multiple micronutrient supplementation (MMS)







## SUN MOVEMENT IN PAKISTAN

Nutrition International supports the SUN Movement in Pakistan and has hosted the Secretariat for the SUN Civil Society Alliance (SUNCSA) and the SUN Academia and Research (SUNAR) Network Pakistan since 2015 and 2016, respectively.

SUNCSA is a coalition of more than 250 civil society organizations from across the country, engaged to advocate for nutrition policies, programs and budgetary allocations. Through the SUNCSA platform, Nutrition International advocates for the implementation of multisectoral nutrition strategies and nutrition-related legislation, enhanced budgetary allocations for nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, and recognition of food and nutrition security as a fundamental right in the Pakistan constitution.

Nutrition International supports evidence generation for nutrition policy formulation and planning through SUNAR Pakistan, a network of more than 100 universities and academic institutions involved in nutrition teaching and research.

Over the years, Nutrition International has mobilized multiple resources for strengthening SUNCSA Pakistan and SUNAR Pakistan by securing grants from New Venture Fund, the Australian government, and SUN Pooled Funds Grant through the United Nations Office for Project Services.

Leading nutrition advocacy in the country, Nutrition International is the elected Chair of the Development Partners for Nutrition Group and a member of the International Coalition for Advocating Nutrition.



## CURRENT PROJECTS

### MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Nutrition International supports the provincial and district governments in the provinces of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Punjab to strengthen maternal and newborn health and nutrition services. The overall strategy design was developed after a series of internal and external consultations, with a focus on ensuring pregnant women receive iron-folic acid (IFA) supplementation for anaemia reduction. The strategy aims to provide a continuum of care from household to health facility by strengthening referral and follow-up systems to address barriers in utilization of and compliance to IFA supplementation, improving newborn survival through kangaroo mother care services, building capacity of government health employees on IFA adherence and supply chain management, and piloting the integration of family planning with nutrition.

Nutrition International has also undertaken a pilot communication campaign in Punjab and Sindh focusing on improving maternal nutrition. The campaign is the first attempt to engage the vast but unregulated private health sector for maternal nutrition in Pakistan. The objective is to build awareness of maternal nutrition among healthcare providers and frontline health workers directly, and via key opinion leaders and other stakeholders, and improve their maternal nutrition knowledge and practices through targeted media communication.

In 2020 and 2021, as part of the COVID-19 emergency response, Nutrition International implemented a project in seven tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to address maternal anaemia through technical assistance and commodities provision. The project benefitted more than 79,000 pregnant women through IFA supplementation, safe delivery practices, and training of healthcare providers and frontline health workers on maternal, newborn and child health-focused interpersonal counselling skills.

### Multiple micronutrient supplementation

In response to the recently updated World Health Organization (WHO) guidance on multiple micronutrient supplementation (MMS) for pregnancy, the Government of Pakistan has been planning the introduction of MMS through antenatal care platforms. Nutrition International is supporting a pilot project to transition from IFA to MMS in the Swabi district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including leading implementation research on MMS. The specific objectives of the project are to support the introduction of antenatal MMS to replace IFA supplementation through antenatal care alongside producing research to identify effective implementation approaches, and inform the sustainable transition and scale-up to ensure maximum impact of MMS in the target area of Pakistan.

During the one-year implementation period, all newly-enrolled pregnant women accessing public antenatal care services will be provided with MMS instead of IFA supplements. The technical support provided will include training and supportive supervision for healthcare providers, a behaviour change intervention strategy and materials, program monitoring, and strengthening of the supply chain system from district to facility or community service delivery platforms.





## CURRENT PROJECTS



### ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND NUTRITION

In collaboration with national and provincial health departments at the district, provincial and national levels, Nutrition International pioneered the weekly iron and folic acid supplementation (WIFAS) program for in-school adolescent girls in Pakistan, with a demonstration project that was completed in December 2021. Through this work, Nutrition International is supporting the government in understanding the opportunities, challenges and limits of implementing adolescent nutrition programs in schools, specifically WIFAS and nutrition education.

During the project, two three-month rounds of WIFAS were completed in one year, as recommended by WHO guidelines. Nutrition International has expanded the project to additional areas in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. Through the intervention, Nutrition International aims to:

- Advocate for adoption of WIFAS as a national, government-led program
- Develop and expand an inclusive WIFAS program for in-school and out-of-school adolescent girls, as well as those living in vulnerable circumstances
- Provide gender-sensitive nutrition education for both girls and boys
- Address nutritional needs of pregnant adolescent girls
- Include water, sanitation and hygiene, and menstrual hygiene and management in adolescent nutrition programs



### VITAMIN A SUPPLEMENTATION

To improve the health and survival of children of 6-59 months living in vulnerable situations, Nutrition International continues to ensure these children receive two doses of lifesaving vitamin A annually. In 2022, more than 35 million children in the country received two doses of vitamin A.

Nutrition International supports the Government of Pakistan in its efforts to improve and sustain the coverage of vitamin A supplementation by providing technical support in the form of monitoring and capacity building of the district focal persons, task force meetings, advocacy, and raising awareness on the importance of vitamin A through radio and television commercials.

Since the inception of its vitamin A program in Pakistan in 2001, Nutrition International has delivered one billion doses of vitamin A. Currently, 94% of children aged 6-59 months receive biannual vitamin A supplements with the support from Nutrition International.



### UNIVERSAL SALT IODIZATION

Nutrition International has been working with the Government of Pakistan, the salt industry and other key partners since 2006 to support USI in the country, with the aim to reduce iodine deficiency disorders. Currently, almost 80% of all edible salt produced in the country is adequately iodized.

There has been a significant increase in household use of iodized salt, from 17% in 2001 to 80% in 2018. This has resulted in a decrease in iodine deficiency disorders in mothers, school-aged children, and newborns. Nutrition International has played a key role in the establishment of a revolving fund for ensuring the uninterrupted provision of potassium iodate, the fortificant used for salt iodization. Every year, around 180 million people in the country are reached with iodized edible salt.

## CURRENT PROJECTS



## LARGE-SCALE FOOD FORTIFICATION

Nutrition International is committed to facilitating fortification of industrially produced staple foods; a simple, efficient, and cost-effective mean to combat malnutrition, including playing a significant role in the formation of National Fortification Alliance which advocates for food fortification in Pakistan.

Nutrition International provides support to the public and private sectors in the scale-up and institutionalization of wheat flour and edible oil fortification in Pakistan.

### Wheat flour fortification

Mandatory fortification of wheat flour with iron, folic acid, zinc and vitamin B12 is considered the most viable solution to eradicate micronutrient deficiencies on a large scale. Nutrition International has provided capacity-building support to the wheat flour industry to implement fortification through the installation of 2,333 micro-feeders in 992 wheat flour mills, and trained government officials and wheat flour millers on fortification processes and quality assurance and quality control (QAQC). Nutrition International has also equipped public and private laboratories in all four provinces to implement fortification-related QAQC protocols.

Nutrition International is providing support to the National Fortification Alliance, working under the Ministry of National Health Services and Regulations to create an enabling environment for the implementation of food fortification activities in Pakistan.

Nutrition International's advocacy efforts and support in drafting mandatory food fortification bills have resulted in enactment of food fortification laws in the provinces of Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while approval in Punjab is in process. Nutrition International continues to support the relevant departments in these provinces to develop rules of business and regulations to ensure implementation and enforcement of food fortification interventions at all levels.

Nutrition International provides technical assistance to the Food Department of the Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the private sector to ensure effective monitoring and adequate fortification. Nutrition International also supports the facilitation of repair and maintenance of micro-feeders installed at mills and procurement of iron spot test kits for internal quality control.

### Edible oil fortification

Nutrition International started implementing edible oil fortification in Pakistan in 2017. The program gradually expanded to all 146 operational mills in Pakistan and reaches 140 million people annually with the adequacy of fortification improving from a baseline of 19% in 2017 to over 90% in 2021.

Since November 2022, Nutrition International has been supporting edible oil fortification initiatives in Pakistan to ensure sustainable, comprehensive QAQC mechanisms and to achieve public health impact. The project is building the technical and human resource capacity of public sector food regulatory bodies to further develop and sustain fortification, ensure premix quality control mechanisms, and implement an effective ban on the sale of loose or unrefined oil coming from the informal sector.

Nutrition International also provides technical support to millers to improve and sustain internal quality assurance in their production processes to ensure compliance with government standards. The project is continuing to work with all functional oil mills in the country and aims to reach more than 155 million people annually with oil fortified with vitamins A and D.





## DIARRHOEA MANAGEMENT

Childhood diarrhoea is a major cause of child morbidity and mortality in Pakistan. While care-seeking for childhood diarrhoea has increased from 61% in 2012-2013 to 71% in 2017-2018, only 8% of these children receive the recommended treatment of zinc and LO-ORS.

To increase the coverage and utilization of zinc and LO-ORS in the management of childhood diarrhoea, Nutrition International developed a strategy, in consultation with the Government of Pakistan, to implement a pilot program in Punjab province, which was later scaled to Sindh and Balochistan. The project treated more than 1.2 million diarrhoea cases and built the capacity of more than 26,000 healthcare providers. The strategy focused on building community awareness and bridging the gaps in policy formulation and supply chain management, capacity building, and program monitoring.

During COVID-19, Nutrition International implemented a project in six targeted districts of Balochistan for the treatment of diarrhoea cases. In addition to treating 89,000 diarrhoea cases, capacity building was conducted with community resource persons and lady health workers on the importance of zinc and LO-ORS for diarrhoea management, and local procurement of zinc and LO-ORS was ensured.