

Navigating the Triple Burden: Bridging Agricultural Gaps for Enhanced Nutrition in Sri Lanka



Roshan Delabandara¹, Anoma Chandrasekara^{1,2} ¹Nutrition Society of Sri Lanka, ²Sri Lanka Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka

Rationale

Sri Lanka is undergoing significant transitions, encompassing demographics, epidemiology, nutrition, and economic growth towards an upper-middle-income status. Its economic foundation rests on agriculture, services, and light industry. However, the country grapples with the intricate challenge of the triple burden of malnutrition, marked by the coexistence of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity-linked diseases, despite overall improvements in social indicators.

Objective

This paper aims to present the main gaps identified in the agriculture sector that hinder effective nutritional outcomes and to highlight priorities for mainstreaming nutrition within this sector

Methodology

A situational analysis ->
Reviewed available
literature and data on
malnutrition and
agriculture in Sri Lanka

More than 50 gaps were identified related to agriculture sector \rightarrow Scaled down to 25 gaps

Prioritized 16 gaps

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews Held with relevant stakeholders- farmers, extension officers, health workers, and policy makers, to validate and refine identified gaps

Gaps were ranked based on severity and impact on nutrition and health outcomes in the food system

Gaps were classified into three categories: low, medium, and critical, based on the direct and indirect linkages between agriculture and nutrition









Results

Critical

- Nutrition is not identified adequately as an objective in agriculture sectors
- Lack of policy coherence and collaborations
- Coherent information gaps in agriculture sector
- Less priority given for production and access of nutritious foods
- Less nutrition knowledge in individuals involving in food value chain
- Lack of effective management systems to maintain the natural resources
- Low social and income level of vulnerable groups including inadequate

Medium

- Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture is a not main priority
- Nutritious food is costly
- Low attention given for bio fortification of staple food crops
- Home gardens to increase food and nutrient supply is not streamlined
- Nutrition insensitive dialog between the farmer and agriculture extension worker
- Lack of proper system to streamline food handling
- Priority is not given to exploit underutilized potential nutritious food sources
- Lack of horizontal integration among different actors in the food value chain

Low

Less efficient quality management systems in the food value chain

Discussion

Within the agriculture sector, seven critical gaps have been prioritized that impede optimal nutritional outcomes. To address these challenges, recommendations have been proposed, ranging from integrating nutrition objectives into agricultural policies to establishing multi-sectoral action plans, enhancing data sharing, promoting nutritious food production and access, improving nutrition education, and empowering marginalized groups.

Conclusion

The imperative of holistic, multi-sectoral strategies that seamlessly intertwine nutrition considerations with agriculture to combat the triple burden of malnutrition is warranted. Addressing the highlighted gaps and implementing the recommended measures has the potential to yield enduring, effective solutions for mitigating malnutrition challenges in Sri Lanka.

Significance

This synthesis is firmly rooted in the UNICEF conceptual framework of undernutrition and a comprehensive food systems approach, providing a robust foundation for coordinated efforts aimed at enhancing nutritional outcomes on a national scale. As Sri Lanka navigates these challenges, embracing such strategies becomes essential for achieving sustainable improvements in its population's nutritional well-being.