

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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Nutrition is a well-defined marker for the development of a nation. Diet plays a fundamental role in devising the nutritional status and health of a nation. Improved nutrition is a platform for advancement in health, education, employment, empowerment of women, and the reduction of poverty and inequality. Malnutrition is a worldwide issue that has been affecting most of the world's population. The unavailability of essential nutrients in the diet leads to malnutrition at any critical point in the lifecycle, from infancy to old age.

Despite sufficient food production, 3.5 billion people are facing malnutrition out of the present 7.6 billion population on the globe. Children under 5 years old face multiple burdens: 150.8 million are stunted, 50.5 million are wasted, and 38.3 million are overweight. Meanwhile, 20 million babies are born with low-birth-weight each year. Overweight and obesity among adults are at a record high level with 38.9%. Food insecurity has become one of the major national problems in Pakistan. The population is facing a high proportion of malnutrition due to nutrition insecurity, particularly children less than 5 years old are suffering from stunting, wasting, underweight, and micronutrient deficiencies. In the Pakistani diet, cereals remain the main staple food that provides 62% of total energy. Compared to other Asian countries, the level of milk consumption is significant in Pakistan, whereas the consumption of fruits and vegetables, fish, and meat remains very low. Fluctuations in the availability of important foods will probably be one of the factors responsible for the deficiency of micro-nutrients in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, about 19% of the population is undernourished. It is estimated that malnutrition accounts for a loss of 3% of GDP (\$7.6 billion) every year. Nutrition insecurity is a challenge for Pakistan, which has resulted due to lack of nutritional awareness, high population growth, low purchasing power, price fluctuations, erratic

food production and losses, poor quality of processed foods, inefficient marketing system, and low healthcare and hygienic services. Such unhealthy dietary practices are responsible for the increased prevalence of nutritional deficiencies and disorders, such as overweight and obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and other chronic diseases. Furthermore, sedentary lifestyles and lack of outdoor activities, low-quality energy-dense dietary intake, infections (due to lack of clean water, sanitation, and hygiene), especially among children and women of childbearing age, also worsen the health status of the Pakistani population.

To address all forms of malnutrition, a multisectoral program and policies are inevitable for improving diet, nutritional status of mothers and children with effective nutritional awareness, communication, coordination, collaboration, and integration across all sectors. Pakistan government is aware of the consequences. Hence, several programs have been launched like good nutrition in the first 1000 days of life (starting from the day when a woman conceives), food fortification, and biodiversifications. These have been found to be the most cost-effective and sustainable solutions to overcome micronutrient deficiencies. The economic access to minimum adapted food basket based on the desirable dietary pattern can also be an important planning tool, on the basis of which the availability and consumption trend of essential food items can be guaranteed. Hence, these set targets to undermine malnutrition can be achieved through enhanced nutrition awareness and healthy practices, institutional strengthening, and implementation of a comprehensively planned nutrition strategy.