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- An Executive Summary -

Funding Nutrition in Asia

A Landscape Study

With Deep-dives in Bangladesh,
Indonesia and the Philippines

About this Report

This report aims to serve as a resource for stakeholders in nutrition to assess the opportunities and challenges in philanthropic funding for maternal and child nutrition in Asia, with a special focus on interventions in food fortification and first 1,000 days of life. It presents an overview of the current landscape of the state of funding for nutrition, highlighting innovative funding solutions by public, private sector and other key stakeholders. It features extended analyses of the state of affairs in three countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia; and the Philippines.

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Executive Summary

By the time a child turns three, his or her brain will have grown to 80% of its adult size.⁴ The lived experience of a child during the first 1,000 days of life, from conception to their second birthday, presents both tremendous potential and immense vulnerability, contributing to lead-on consequences that are felt into adulthood. Lack of adequate nutrition of the mother during pregnancy and birth and child during this period can result in stunted growth, increased vulnerability to diseases, cognitive impairment, and in some cases, death.

Strategic intervention in this period can prevent these adverse outcomes. **Directing philanthropic financing towards interventions within the first 1,000 days and food fortification can arrest and even reverse the multi-generational impact of malnutrition, allowing more children to develop to their fullest potential and reducing child mortality.** Interventions at this stage are also the most cost-effective, with every dollar spent by donors resulting in a USD 16 return to the local economy.⁵

Worldwide, an estimated USD 3.9 billion is spent annually on supporting solutions to combat malnutrition among women and children⁶, a far cry from what is needed to meet global standards, estimated to require an additional USD 6.9 billion per year until 2025.

In light of persistent, mounting challenges to malnutrition, new and existing funders need to

reconsider their place in the funding landscape for maternal and child nutrition. At the time this report was being prepared, countries around the world were in the midst of coming to terms with the reality of the 2019-20 [COVID-19] Coronavirus epidemic. First surfacing in Hubei province in China in December 2019, within months, the virus had spread like wildfire to all continents and had seen high rates of infection and accompanying fatalities of between 2-10% depending on the pre-existing health conditions, region, response rate, and available facilities and equipment. In response to this contagion, countries have closed borders and introduced measures varying in severity from social-distancing and compulsory lockdowns at the other end of the spectrum. Agriculture and food systems have been negatively impacted, healthcare facilities overburdened and with school closures, and children who were dependent on school feeding programmes are now at risk of going hungry. These are just some ways in which maternal and child nutrition and health have been impacted in the short run, and experts have said that it will be difficult to assess the extent of its long-term impacts. One thing is certain; now, more than ever, the need for funders who are both responsive and cognisant of the intersectionality and far-reaching impacts of nutrition in crises is becoming increasingly apparent.

At the inaugural N4G summit in 2013, stakeholders pledged to prevent at least 20 million children from

4 1,000 Days, "[Good Nutrition During the First 1,000 Days Provides the Building Blocks for Healthy Brain Development.](#)"

5 Nutrition for Growth, "[Nutrition for Growth.](#)"

6 Meera Shekar et al., "[Investing in Nutrition.](#)"

being stunted;⁷ and at the point of the last N4G summit, hosted in Milan, Italy in 2017, N4G donors had deployed USD 21.8 billion, almost USD 2 billion more than the commitments at the inaugural pledging summit in 2013. The impact of this capital deployment is seen in the surge in data being collected around nutrition. Some key global indicators include only slight improvements in breastfeeding rates, which increased from 37% to 41% in the period between 2012 and 2017, whilst at the same time, sales of infant formula continue to rise and persistently low numbers of children aged between six and 23 months have acceptable diets (i.e., one in five) or get the recommended minimum number of meals (i.e., one in two).⁸

To support this endeavour, this report maps the funding landscape in Asia, identifying overarching and context specific opportunities and challenges, and presents a roadmap for effective interventions in maternal and child malnutrition in Asia. With a focus on Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the report highlights philanthropic funders who are engaged in innovative solutions in maternal and child nutrition and outline opportunities to mobilise further funding for this area of critical need. Innovative funding solutions were selected because of their commitment to: i) taking a novel approach to engaging the communities within which they work; ii) taking advantage of multi-stakeholder partnerships to scale impact, and; iii) ensuring the sustainability of the programme.

7 Teresa Welsh, "[2020 Must Be Year of Action on Nutrition, Advocates Say.](#)"

8 Global Nutrition Report, "[2018 Global Nutrition Report.](#)"



Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines have been selected for these deep-dives not only because they are among the markets with the highest rates of stunting and wasting in Asia, but also because they present unique challenges and opportunities for funders to consider in developing their nutrition strategies. Whilst all three markets have strong government initiatives supported by international funders, the markets vary in the degrees of social investment and philanthropy that they receive.

- **Bangladesh.** Philanthropic efforts by local corporate entities and foundations remain small and fragmented, mainly conflating nutrition efforts, like tracking stunting rates with healthcare provision. The garment industry is a significant one, made up of 80% women, and corporate entities are increasingly developing solutions to bring nutritious fresh foods and prepared meals to this population.
- **Indonesia.** Religious giving is a strong motivator amongst both individuals and corporate entities, and there has been an increasing emergence of giving circles that are motivated by networks of trust. As the Indonesian government expands priority locations as part of the National Strategy to Accelerate Stunting Reduction to 514 regencies by 2021, funders will find more opportunities for partnership with the government and other actors who are driving resources into these newly recognised areas.
- **The Philippines.** Efforts to combat malnutrition remain somewhat superficial, largely concentrated on feeding programmes with some innovators going one step beyond in developing partnerships to develop multi-pronged solutions that target improved nutrition education, behavioural change and food security. There is a growing realisation that taking a targeted approach at barangay (community) level could yield high impacts.

With the Nutrition for Growth 2020 Summit, this is a year of renewed commitment, acknowledging that should things continue on their current trajectory, the

losses, both economic and social, would be dire. Recognising that investment in nutrition can produce both short-term and long-term outcomes, stakeholders - public and private, international and local, from across the social investment spectrum - must come alongside global flows promptly. Only then can maternal and child malnutrition be arrested and reversed quickly and conclusively.

Some themes and guiding principles that have emerged from our research for current and potential funders in this space include:

- **Collaboration scales impact.** Engage the power of collaboration, pooled funding mechanisms and collective action in order to fully utilise resources and scale impact.
- **Alignment with government initiatives ensures sustainability.** Align interventions with national and international frameworks in order to ensure maximum positive impact, avoid adverse effects, and guarantee sustainability of projects beyond the intended commitment period.
- **Learn from proven evidence-based interventions instead of reinventing the wheel.** Take advantage of proven evidence-based interventions and delivery platforms. Put in place a strong monitoring and evaluation system to guide the intervention and post-intervention strategy.
- **Review your contribution critically.** Critically review your intended contribution vis-a-vis the current landscape and environment within which the intervention is to be implemented, to ensure the proposed solutions give credence to community habits and cultures so as to not impose unfamiliar systems.
- **Consider the intersectionality of existing programmes with nutrition.** Make nutrition an integrated part of other interventions in other sectors, e.g., education, health, WASH — in a meaningful way so as not to dilute efforts. In the

same vein, nutrition should be linked via food systems to key issues such as climate mitigation, biodiversity enhancement, livelihood promotion, and sustainable natural resource use.

- **Target both short-and long-term outcomes.** When designing interventions, consider if they address the primary cause of poor nutritional status. If they do not, complementary strategies (short-, medium-, and long-term) might be required.
- **Invest in longer-term commitments where possible.** Changes in nutritional, health and sanitation behaviour do not happen overnight. Consistent touch points with beneficiaries improve the sustainability of nutrition outcomes.
- **Do not be afraid to innovate.** Innovation in financing and solutions-development can catalyse action and impact.



As the only comprehensive funders' network in Asia, AVPN is a leading ecosystem builder for the social investment sector with 600+ members globally. AVPN's mission is to catalyse the movement toward a more strategic, collaborative and outcome-focused approach to social investing, ensuring that resources are deployed as effectively as possible to address key social challenges facing Asia today and in the future.

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