

An Overview of the Nutrition Knowledge Systems and Networks in India

OBJECTIVES

One of the objectives of POSHAN is to facilitate the availability of, access to, and use of knowledge to inform program and policy decisions among stakeholders working in nutrition in India. To understand how POSHAN can best support and strengthen knowledge mobilization in nutrition, a team from POSHAN reviewed the reach, use, and role of existing *knowledge systems* and *knowledge networks* (Exhibit 1) in India.

METHODOLOGY

The team performed a desk review of 24 knowledge networks and systems that are currently promoting access to nutrition knowledge in India (Exhibit 2, next page). This process included reviewing their geographic and thematic focus, principle languages used, knowledge products and services, and target

audiences. From this initial review, the team further analyzed 16 of these networks or systems, focusing on those that policymakers and decisionmakers were most likely to use. These included initiatives at the national, state, and relevant regional or international levels. The team adapted the Networks Functions Approach methodology, from the Overseas Development Institute¹ to analyze the role played by each initiative in mobilizing knowledge. The team also interviewed representatives from 10 of the initiatives to understand the access and use of knowledge networks and systems in India.

FINDINGS

Range and Scope

- Five knowledge systems and networks solely focus on nutrition, with the rest focusing on nutrition as a subset of health.

EXHIBIT 1 Key terms used

Knowledge mobilization: The process of connecting research to decisionmakers to inform decisions about public policy and professional practice.

Knowledge system: A virtual tool to support the creation, capture, storage, and dissemination of information.

Knowledge network: Groups of institutions or individuals that work together on a common concern, strengthen each other's capacity, share knowledge, and identify possible solutions to address that concern.

EXHIBIT 2 Knowledge systems and networks that were reviewed

Knowledge Systems±	Websites
India Development Gateway	www.indg.in/india *
Mother and Child Nutrition.org	www.motherchildnutrition.org/india/index.html *
National Child Health Resource Centre	www.202.71.128.172/nihfw/nchrc □ *
National Health Systems Resource Centre	www.nhsrindia.org/index.php □ *
National Institute of Nutrition	www.ninindia.org/employment.htm
National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development	www.nipccd.nic.in/
Nutrition Foundation of India	www.nutritionfoundationofindia.res.in/
Nutrition Society of India	www.nutritionsofindia.org/default.htm
Regional Resource Centres	www.fpaindia.org/FinalWeb/home.htm
United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition	www.unscn.org *
Virtual Resource Centre	www.jskvrc.gov.in/about.asp □ *
Knowledge Networks±	
Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India	www.bpni.org *
Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative	www.chnri.org □ *
Coalition for Sustainable Nutrition Security	www.nutritioncoalition.in □ *
National Neonatology Forum	www.nnfi.org □ *
Protein Foods and Nutrition Development Association of India	www.pfndai.com/index.htm *
Public Health Resource Network	www.phrindia.org/index.html □ *
Right to Food Campaign	www.righttofoodindia.org □
Solution Exchange for the Food and Nutrition Security Community of Practice □ *	www.solutionexchange-un.net.in
Solution Exchange for the Maternal and Child Health Community of Practice □ *	www.solutionexchange-un.net.in
South Asian Public Health Forum	www.saphf.org/index.htm *
South East Asian Nutrition Research cum Action Network	http://apps.who.int/nut/research3.htm *
White Ribbon Alliance	www.whiteribbonalliance.org/index.cfm/about *
PRS Legislative Research	www.prsindia.org

Source: Authors.

*Analyzed with Network Functions Approach methodology.

□ Representatives participated in interviews

- ▶ Among the knowledge systems, there is some duplication in terms of resources and content.
 - ▶ All of the knowledge networks and systems operate in English. Four also provide materials in Hindi and one provides materials in multiple Indian languages.
- Roles Played in Mobilizing Knowledge**
- ▶ Ten knowledge networks and systems bring stakeholders together to discuss and learn about key nutrition issues.
 - ▶ Four knowledge networks and systems play an advocacy role in nutrition.
 - ▶ A few of the knowledge initiatives engage in training and capacity development of frontline workers. No initiative aims to strengthen the use of and interpretation of evidence.
 - ▶ There are few formal links among the knowledge networks and systems. Knowledge networks that bring varied stakeholders together largely do not have an associated strong knowledge resource base. Knowledge systems largely



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lack mechanisms to share this knowledge with stakeholders.

- ▶ The majority of knowledge networks and systems do not attempt to influence policy, but aim to facilitate knowledge exchange and strengthen program practice.
- ▶ Though most knowledge networks and systems do not have an explicit aim to influence policy, many have been able to inform the policy or practice of its members or other stakeholders. However, evidence of how the knowledge is shared and used by policymakers is incomplete due to limited monitoring.

Access and Use

- ▶ Collectively, the knowledge networks and systems reach thousands of people, including nutrition, health and food security practitioners, policy makers, and national and international stakeholders.
- ▶ Interviewees are aware of a number of the knowledge networks and systems and cite a preference for ones run by the government, but do not report regular use of these initiatives.

- ▶ Interviewees report that face-to-face events are effective at building ownership, promoting greater interaction, and energizing knowledge networks.
- ▶ Lack of active participation by members and low resources are reported challenges towards sustaining knowledge networks and systems.
- ▶ Overall, interviewees unanimously agree on the need for consensus in moving policy decisions forward, pointing to the need for credible (trusted) platforms and processes that facilitate dialogue and consensus. Almost all the interviewees express concern regarding constraints to generating, demanding, and using knowledge effectively.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of knowledge networks and systems working to promote the use of evidence on nutrition. Many opportunities exist to promote closer linkages among them and to support their work to mobilize evidence for nutrition in India.

NOTE

1. For more information on the Networks Functions Approach, please see: <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/831.pdf>

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Please cite this Research Note as: Anuradha, T., Y. Kunaratnam, and L. McGrath. 2012. *Evidence Review of Knowledge Systems and Networks for Nutrition in India*. New Delhi: International Food Policy Research Institute.

ABOUT POSHAN

Partnerships and Opportunities to Strengthen and Harmonize Actions for Nutrition in India (POSHAN) is a 4-year initiative that aims to build evidence on effective actions for nutrition and support the use of evidence in decisionmaking. It is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by IFPRI in India.

ABOUT RESEARCH NOTES

Research Notes summarize the latest findings from POSHAN-led studies.

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