

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

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ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures



Session: “More than a Meal: School Feeding to Nourish Resilience Futures”

SFPs as Opportunity to Nourish Resilient Asian Children and Young People: Overview of Evidence and Experience

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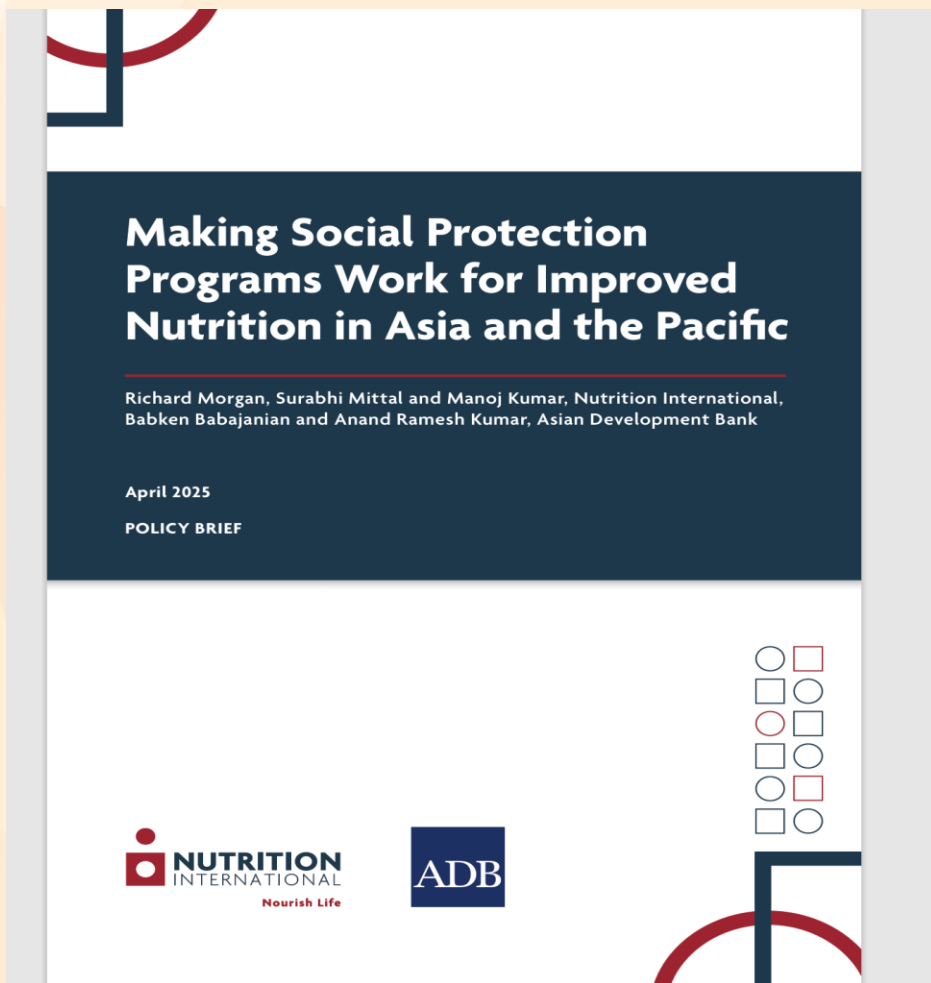
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Our evidence base

Joint Policy Brief by Nutrition International and the Asian Development Bank



Making Social Protection Programs Work for Improved Nutrition in Asia and the Pacific



Asia Landscape Review by Nutrition International across 12 Asian countries



Country experience, including the NI Bangladesh School Feeding study for ADB



The cost of inaction on undernutrition in Asia

OUTCOME	PREVALENCE	NEW CASES PER YEAR	ANNUAL COST ⁱ
 Stunting	22.2% of children under 5	15,266,092	\$259B 0.7% of Total Income ⁱ 
 Low birthweight	14.8% of births	9,907,679	\$118B 0.3% of Total Income ⁱ 
 Anaemia in children	38.5% of children (6-59 months)	24,012,394	\$69B 0.2% of Total Income ⁱ 
 Anaemia in adolescent girls and women	33.5% of adolescent girls and women (15-49y)	386,266,725	\$49B 0.1% of Total Income ⁱ 
TOTAL ECONOMIC COST ⁱ	--	--	\$346B 0.9% of Total Income ⁱ

\$346B

total annual economic
cost in the tool example

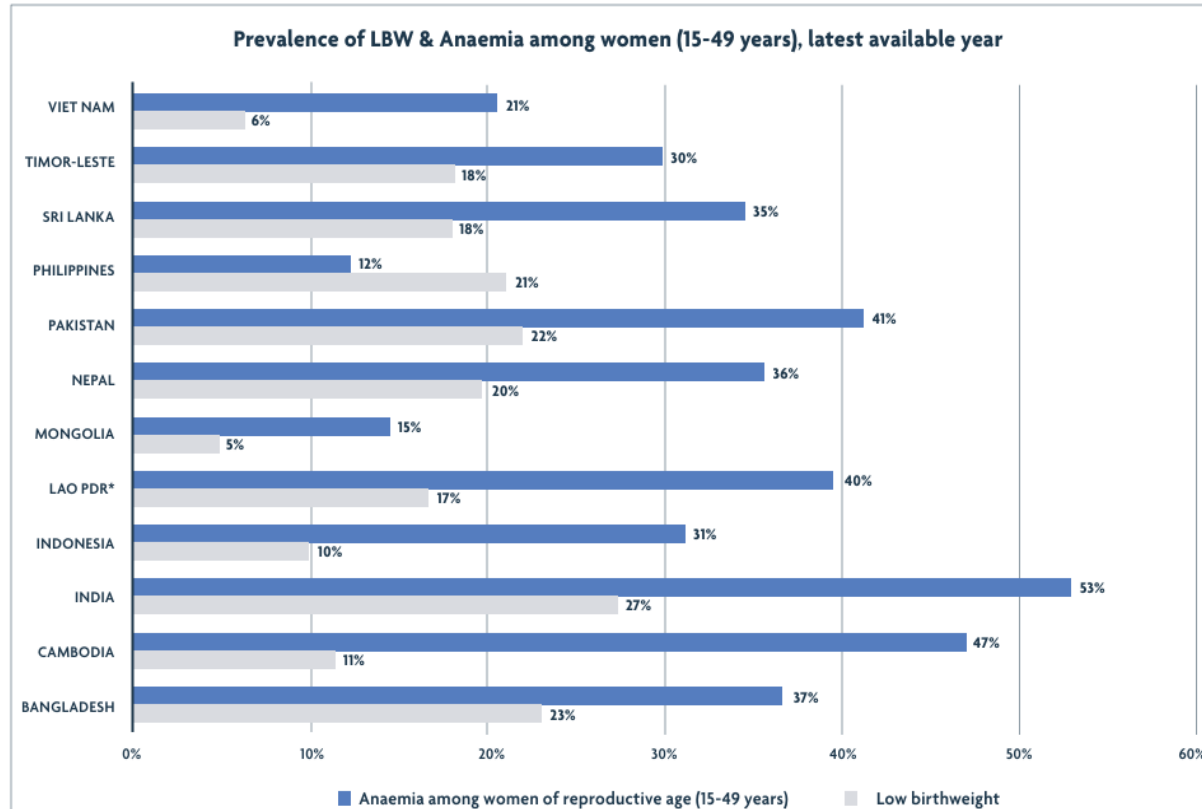
0.9%

of total income



Low birthweight and anaemia remain widespread

FIGURE 3: Prevalence of Low Birthweight and Anaemia, Selected Asian countries



Source(s): UNICEF & WHO, 2022; DHS, 2018; Global Nutrition Report, 2022
 Note(s): Data on LBW are from 2021 (except for Pakistan which has data from 2018); data on the prevalence of anaemia are from 2019
 *Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic



**Today's girls are
tomorrow's mothers**

Nutrition in the school years can
shape health across generations.



Leveraging SFPs for Nutrition: Evidence Overview

Caveat: paucity of good-quality evidence – esp. in lower-income regions & over time (WHO, 2021)

- Quality SFPs can have **small but significant impacts** for pupil weight and height
- When fortified foods or MN supplements are incorporated with SFPs, improvements are seen in **micronutrient status**, including anaemia reduction among adolescent girls
- Evaluations (though limited in Asia) find **improved dietary intake**. Along with MN supplements, and/or deworming, this can provide **catch-up growth** for stunted children
- Indications are that **child overweight and obesity** can be addressed through diet quality in SFPs, plus nutrition awareness/shaping of diet preferences, physical activity
- **Positive intergenerational efforts** are suggested for girl children of mothers who participated in SFPs by study of the Mid-Day Meals program in India.



Findings from Asia

NI Asia Landscape Review and NI/ADB Policy Brief 2025



Coverage varies widely: and mostly reaches primary level



Need to design with intent: nutrition-sensitive design is essential for nutrition benefits



Need to base design on data: nutritionist input, nutrition status and needs, and feasibility



A platform for health and nutrition services: IFA supplements, deworming, immunisation, vision and oral health



Beyond the classroom: parents, out-of-school girls (e.g. Pakistan BISP/NI) and shock response through take-home rations, etc



Three delivery approaches school feeding

Findings from the NI Bangladesh study for ADB; the choice is affected by political economy



Centralised

STRENGTHS

Economies of scale in costs, procurement and supervision; standard nutrition protocols

TRADE-OFFS

Less flexible to local needs and capacities



Decentralised

STRENGTHS

Greater scope to involve parents, NGOs, private sector and local producers; stimulates local markets

TRADE-OFFS

Harder logistics, quality control and access to nutrition expertise



Hybrid

STRENGTHS

Central funding with flexible sourcing and local arrangements

TRADE-OFFS

Can inherit weaknesses of both in the absence of strong governance and agile local management



Summary: Four pointers for Asia



Design with intent

Build nutrition goals, components and indicators into programs, guided by context analysis and feasibility checks



Reach those most in need

Prioritise vulnerable areas, families and at-risk girls, who are least likely to be enrolled. Use participatory outreach and ensure quality, adequacy and regularity



Use practical entry points

Fortified foods, micronutrient supplements, school gardens, nutrition awareness (including parents), health services and shock response



Link with social protection

Consider synergies with other Social Protection interventions: e.g. fee waivers; stipends for girls

Nutrition-focused school feeding, combined with school and community health and nutrition services, can transform growth and resilience for Asia's children and young people.

The opportunity is not simply to feed children.

It is also to use school feeding as a platform to nourish healthier, more resilient futures.

Nutrition × Health × Education × Social Protection.

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