

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

WORKSHOP TITLE	A Children's Nutrition Dialogue for Herat
WORKSHOP DATE	Thursday, 21 November 2024 14:30 GMT +04:30
CONVENED BY	Murtaza Haidary, Senior MEAL Coordinator, World Vision Afghanistan; Parwana Rahmani, Child Health Sector Lead, World Vision Afghanistan
EVENT LANGUAGE	Dari Persian
HOST CITY	Herat, Afghanistan
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	Herat Province
WORKSHOP EVENT PAGE	https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/55067/



The outcomes from Children's workshops will contribute to developing and identifying the most urgent and powerful ways to improve nutrition for all, with a focus on children and young people. Each Workshop contributes in four distinct ways:

- Published as publicly available PDFs on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal
- Available as public data on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal "Explore Feedback" page
- Available publicly within a .xls file alongside all Feedback Form data for advanced analysis
- Synthesised into reports that cover which nutrition challenges are faced, what actions are urgently needed and how should these be taken forward - particular, in advance of the Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris, March 2025.

SECTION ONE: PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

30

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

19 12-15

11 16-18

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

15 Female

15 Male

0 Other/Prefer not to say

ADDITIONAL DETAIL ON PARTICIPATION DIVERSITY

The group comprised an equal number of girls and boys, with a mix of urban and rural children. 70% were Dari Persian speakers, with 30% speaking Pashto, 60% Sunni and 40% Shia, and the group included a mix of vulnerable populations, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and children with disabilities.

SECTION TWO: FRAMING

The children's workshop was structured into four main segments: opening, exploration of good nourishment, ideas to improve nourishment, and closing. In the opening section, all the children introduced themselves and mentioned their favourite foods to create a positive atmosphere. Each child wrote their name on a sticky note and listed their favourite foods. They were then asked to share a story or describe a time when there wasn't enough food at home or school, and they felt very hungry but had no money to buy snacks or food during breaks. Our workshop was intentionally designed around the pressing issues of malnutrition, while taking into account local circumstances such as climate change, economic hardships, and ongoing conflicts that significantly impact well-being. Many families struggle with poverty, making it challenging to access nutritious foods. Seasonality exacerbates these food shortages, and participants voiced concerns about environmental issues, including pollution from nearby industries, which they believe negatively influence health and nutritional outcomes. Specific concerns about increasing iron and vitamin A deficiencies in children highlighted the urgent need to address these nutritional gaps, as they pose risks to growth and overall health. The gravity of these issues was evident as participants shared stories of family members forced to forgo nutritious foods due to financial constraints. This critical context framed our discussions, emphasising that nutrition transcends mere quantity; it is essential for health, well-being, and resilience. To ensure a comprehensive exploration of malnutrition, we sought perspectives from both boys and girls, acknowledging their unique viewpoints on the intricate challenges faced by their communities.

SECTION THREE: CHILDREN'S WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES

Participants highlighted a multitude of socio-economic factors influencing nutritional wellbeing.

- 1. Economic Constraints:** Poverty was a dominant theme, limiting access to nutritious food. Families prioritize quantity over quality, often relying on inexpensive processed foods that lack essential nutrients. The cycle of economic hardship leads to decisions that adversely affect child health and development. For instance, boys from the Boys Group emphasised economic challenges: "We want meat and fruits, but we can only afford bread and some tea."
- 2. Lack of Awareness:** There is a pressing need for greater nutritional education among community members. The lack of understanding about what constitutes a healthy diet often results in poor dietary choices, as families remain unaware of the benefits of balanced nutrition.
- 3. Cultural Norms:** Cultural beliefs significantly influence dietary habits. These ingrained perceptions can lead to a limited variety in diets, negatively impacting nutritional intake and overall health. One child articulated, "Malnutrition exists because many mothers prioritise feeding everyone and end up neglecting their own health, thinking it's for the benefit of the family."
- 4. Health Issues:** Chronic health problems further complicate nutritional challenges. One girl noted, "Sick children cannot eat well," which encapsulates how illness can prevent adequate nutrition, resulting in a vicious cycle of malnutrition and health issues. There is also a concern about food waste, particularly when families struggle to provide suitable choices for those who are ill.
- 5. Environmental Factors:** Environmental challenges, such as drought and failed crops, are critical barriers. A boy stated, "When the water is gone and the crops fail, we have no food at home," highlighting how such factors severely limit food availability and perpetuate food insecurity.

URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Children identified several key initiatives to address the pressing nutritional challenges in their communities, emphasising a multi-faceted approach to improve overall health and well-being.

- 1. Educational Initiatives:** Many voices within the community highlighted an urgent need for educational programs focused on nutrition. By learning about balanced diets, food preparation, and the importance of nutrition early on, children can carry these lessons into adulthood, fostering a healthier society.
- 2. Food Distribution Programs:** Participants overwhelmingly voiced the necessity for food assistance initiatives. Food distribution programmes can alleviate hunger and malnutrition, enabling families to prioritise healthy food over cheaper, less nutritious options. Such initiatives could include partnerships with local farms, food banks, or government programs aimed at ensuring that families receive adequate food support.
- 3. Infrastructure Development:** Access to essential services such as clean water and healthcare was another critical theme. One girl emphasised, "Every village should have a clinic nearby; we need places where mothers can learn how to take care of their families' health." This highlights the need for improved healthcare infrastructure to facilitate access to medical care and nutritional guidance. Clinics can serve as vital resources for mothers seeking advice on child nutrition, maternal health, and disease prevention, contributing to healthier families.
- 4. Community Awareness Campaigns:** The idea of grassroots awareness campaigns gained traction as community members discussed the power of shared knowledge. Peer-to-peer learning can be an effective strategy, as mothers often trust the experiences of other mothers. Organising community workshops and discussion groups can foster an environment of support and education, allowing families to exchange tips and recipes centered on nutrition.

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Perceived Role of Government vs. Community: Some believed that the government had a fundamental role in eradicating malnutrition, while others advocated for community action. "We cannot just wait for help; we must start with ourselves," said one girl, promoting a proactive community outlook.

Food Choices vs. Availability: While some participants focused on the choices of food available to them, others tied the issue entirely to economic limitations. "If we could have access to better options, we would make healthier choices," one boy participant mentioned, contrasting with another who argued that "the price is the ultimate barrier."

OVERALL SUMMARY

On November 21, 2024, the Herat Children Dialogues gathered 30 participants, aged 12-18, representing diverse backgrounds from various parts of Herat province. This heterogeneous group discussed pressing nutritional challenges, highlighting concerns over malnutrition, especially the necessity for not only food quantity but also quality. Participants underscored a shared belief that proper nutrition is vital for healthier living.

In engaging discussions with various participant groups, a strong interest in understanding nutrition and addressing malnutrition challenges within their communities emerged. Valuable insights were shared, allowing participants to draw on personal experiences that underscored key themes regarding the importance of nutrition. A poignant remark from a young boy encapsulated this perspective: "Nutrition is not just about eating; it's about what you eat. We need to eat better to live better."

Economic hardship emerged as a key issue, with participants noting how poverty limits access to nutritious foods. Many expressed frustrations at being forced to choose basic staples over healthier options due to financial constraints. Cultural norms further exacerbated the nutritional crisis; traditional dietary preferences often favoured staples like rice and bread over a more varied intake including fruits and vegetables. Participants also recognised that health issues, such as illnesses, disrupt healthy eating habits, particularly due to a lack of proper hygiene when preparing food.

Participants also identified the emotional impact of household stress on dietary habits. One girl shared, "At home, when there is fighting, it affects our appetite; good food doesn't mean anything when you're stressed." Similar perspectives arose within the Girls Group as participants reflected on the structural obstacles they encounter. One boy remarked, "In our village, we have a lot of vegetables, but many families prefer unhealthy snacks because they don't know how to cook the vegetables properly," illustrating a significant gap in dietary education, particularly in rural communities.

Additionally, hygiene and health were crucial components of the discourse, with participants acknowledging the interplay between food safety and malnutrition. A child from the girls' group noted, "Some children are always sick because their mothers do not wash vegetables or meat properly; without good hygiene, even healthy food can make you sick."

Overall, these dialogues illuminate the multifaceted nature of nutrition and malnutrition, emphasising the need for targeted interventions that address economic, cultural, emotional, and educational barriers within communities.

To combat these challenges, participants proposed several urgent and longer-term responses. They called for educational programmes related to proper nutrition and the establishment of food distribution programs to alleviate immediate hunger.

Infrastructure improvements were advocated to ensure access to clean water and healthcare. Additionally, community awareness campaigns were suggested to encourage peer learning among mothers especially, empowering families to make informed nutritional choices. A 15-year-old boy remarked, "Schools should hold classes on eating right; this can change our future." This underscores the consensus that incorporating nutrition education into school curricula can empower the younger generation with the knowledge to make healthier food choices."

Discussions revealed differing views on the roles of government and community initiatives in addressing malnutrition. Some participants believed that government intervention is crucial, while others emphasised grassroots efforts, asserting that communities should take proactive steps toward improving their nutritional landscape. There was also debate on whether food availability or economic factors primarily hindered better nutrition; while some cited limited options, others pointed to the high costs associated with healthier food choices.

The discussion went beyond mere identification of nutritional challenges, reflecting participants' hopes for a healthier future. The insights gathered may be helpful for developing effective programmes tailored to children's needs. The passion and commitment shown by the young people underline the importance of integrating their voices into broader discussions on health and nutrition, fostering a sense of agency and advocacy for change in their communities.

SECTION FOUR: PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT & METHOD

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

Our Dialogue reflected specific aspects of the Principles of Engagement in several ways. Firstly, we ensured transparency and inclusivity by briefing our Facilitators before the event on the participant list and identifying potential areas of competing interests. This preparation allowed us to manage these interests effectively during the Dialogue. We began the Dialogue with a brief introduction of the participants and the event. We invited participants to ask any questions they had before starting the Dialogue and provided answers to those who inquired, started with an icebreaking game and followed with keeping the environment in a child friendly manner. This created an environment where all voices could be heard and respected, fostering open and honest communication. Additionally, we emphasised the importance of mutual respect and active listening throughout the Dialogue. This approach helped to create a collaborative atmosphere where participants felt valued and understood, leading

METHOD AND SETTING

The workshop was set up in the training hall of World Vision Afghanistan's Herat office. Participants were invited through the zonal operations team, which acted as a link between the office and the community. The event was conducted in languages familiar to the participants. Curators provided a simple briefing about the nutrition dialogues and obtained written informed consent. The facilitators emphasised the importance of the children's ideas and perspectives, encouraging them to share freely.

ADVICE FOR OTHER CONVENORS

Longer planning allowing for more coordination with the community would help to ensure breadth of perspectives, and also create more time for children to reflect on their experiences and views of nutrition. Flexibility & adaptability are essential for managing unexpected challenges. Convenors should encourage participation from all team members to incorporate diverse perspectives. Thorough documentation of meetings and decisions is vital for tracking progress and providing future references.

FEEDBACK FORM: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These dialogues were organised and implemented by the World Vision Afghanistan MEAL team, and we acknowledge Najeebullah Lalzad in particular for his leadership in implementing the Herat dialogue. We also extend our gratitude to colleagues from World Vision Afghanistan operations and security teams, to our conveners, curators, facilitators, and record keepers for their dedication and hardwork in leading the sessions, and above all to the children and their caregivers for their active engagement.