

Challenges in Tracking Nutrition Budget Outlays at the National and State Level in India

Policy Brief 4 | 2017



Why we did it

India continues to be afflicted by high levels of child stunting and is home to 29% of the world's stunted under-fives (46.8 million of 159 million in 2013-14). For reducing stunting among Indian children, the essential nutrition specific and sensitive interventions are known and also included in India's policy framework. However, there are constraints largely in the manner in which nutrition interventions are prioritized, financed and reported. The delivery of nutrition interventions happens through a host of programmes and schemes implemented by a range of ministries / departments. This leads to a complex delivery structure, resulting in issues of coordination gaps, overlapping efforts, and lack of streamlined response and accountability structure. While administrative logjams and capacity gaps in delivering nutrition specific and sensitive

interventions in India are discussed a lot, fiscal constraints in delivering these interventions remain relatively under-researched. In this context, we have tried to systematically document the operational challenges encountered while collating and reporting budgets for nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions at Union and state level.

How we did it

- We first listed the set of proven nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions based on global evidence and national programmes.
- Mapping of relevant ministries (and within ministries, programmes/schemes) delivering nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive

Figure 1: Steps followed to arrive at nutrition budgets

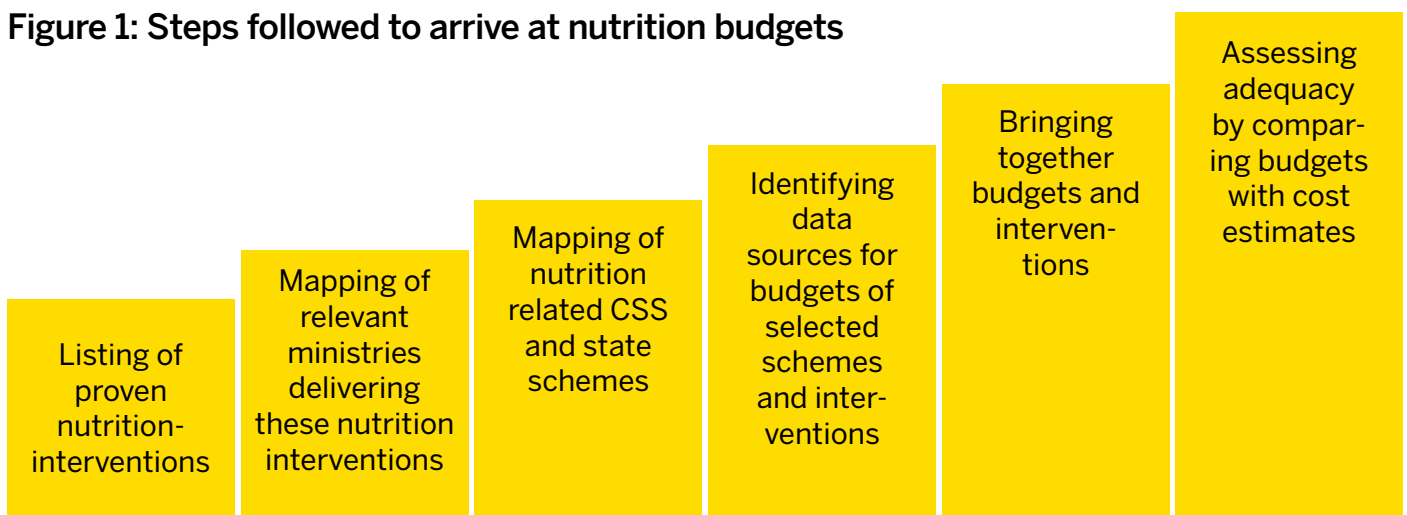


Figure 2: Data sources used for collating information regarding schemes and budgets

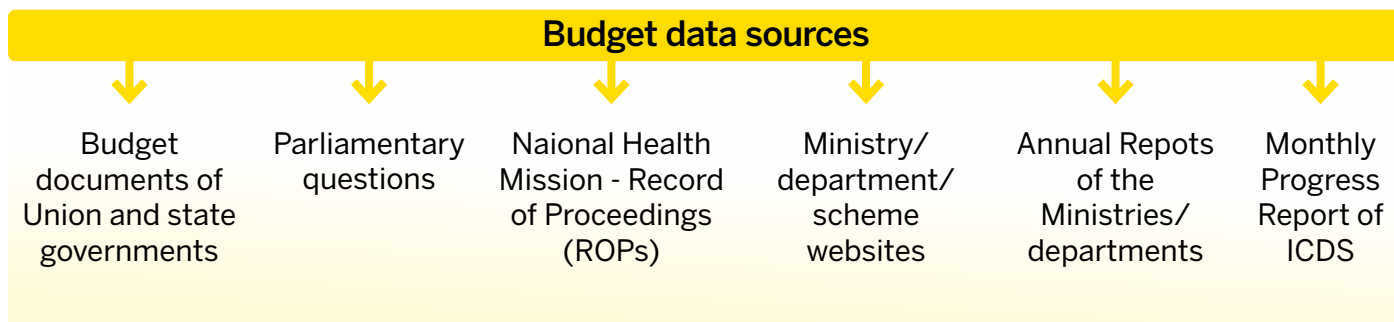
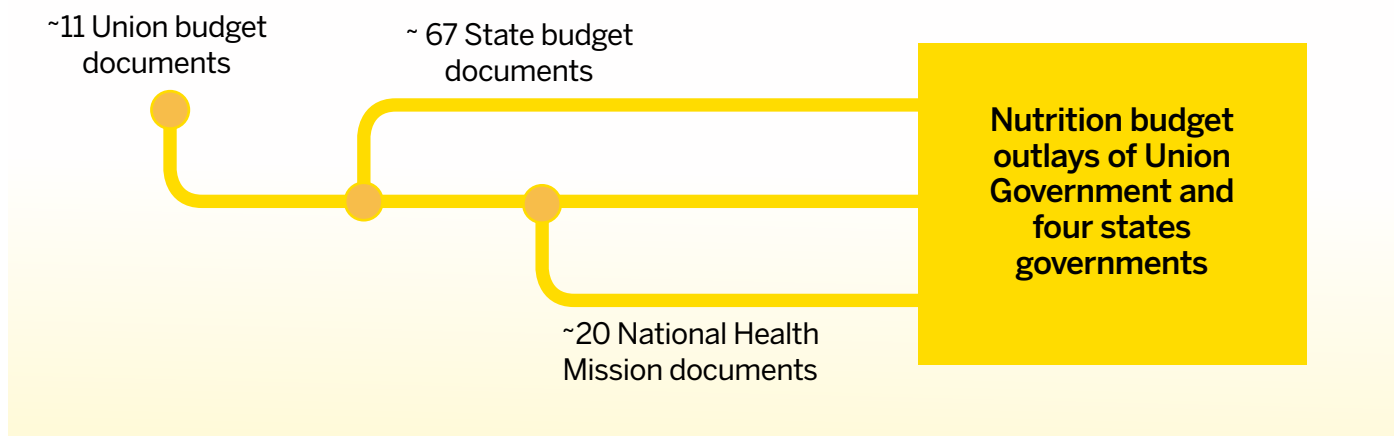


Figure 3: (Approximate) Number of documents studied to arrive at nutrition budget outlays for Union Government and four state governments (for the last three years)



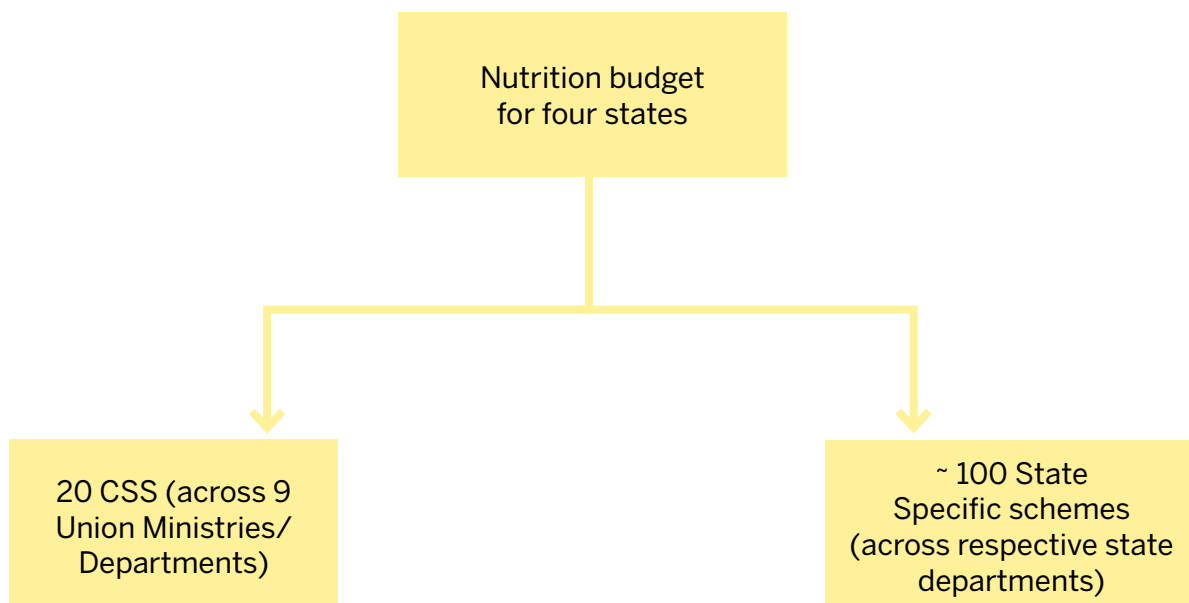
interventions was undertaken (Figure 1 & 2).

- After selecting programmes/schemes, budget heads (Major/Minor) from the budget documents for the respective schemes were identified. Subsequently, line items within these budget heads were studied to collate scheme/intervention related budget data.
- The budget outlays for some of the nutrition-specific interventions were compared with cost estimates developed by Menon et al. (2015). Also, for assessing adequacy of funds for Supplementary Nutrition Programme within ICDS, budget outlays were compared with government's own cost norms.

What we found

- Budget outlays for nutrition-specific interventions across four study states comprise <2% of the total state budgets. Nutrition-sensitive interventions constituted about 12.5% of Union budget and varied across states in 2016-17.
- A standard set of interventions for nutrition to be referred to for analysing budgets is not available.
- Nutrition interventions are spread across 20 centrally sponsored schemes, which fall under 9 Ministries/Departments, and approx. 100 state-specific schemes for 4 study states (Figure 3 & 4).

Figure 4: Number of CSS and state schemes studied for tracking nutrition budgets (Union Government and four states)

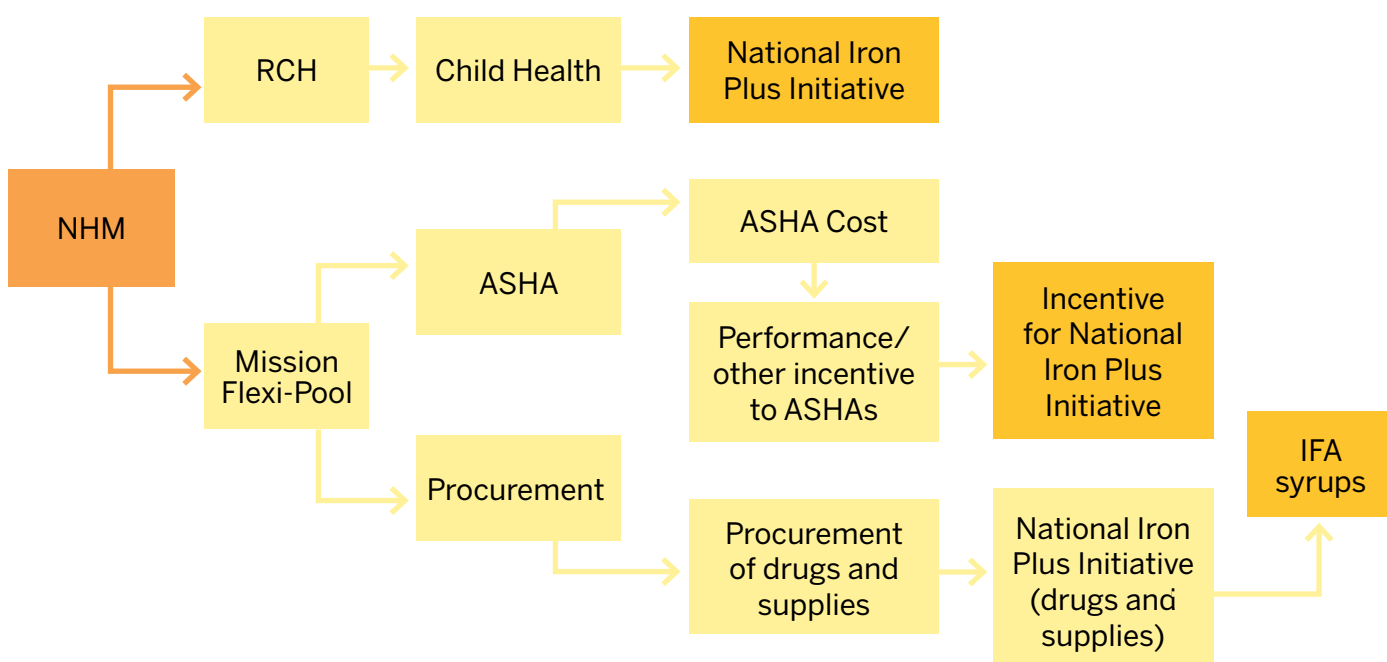


- Nutrition-specific interventions are largely the components / sub-components within the larger schemes. For example, Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplements for children 6–59 months are part of National Iron Plus Initiative, within National Health Mission. Also, budgets have to be collated from various line items to arrive at the total allocation

for the intervention for a target group (Figure 5).

- **The basket of Nutrition-sensitive interventions is diverse:**
Lancet 2013 series points out that scaling up nutrition-specific to 90% coverage could reduce child stunting by about 20% (Bhutta, et al.,

Figure 5: Complexities in tracking budgets for nutrition-specific interventions: Example of Iron supplements for children 6–59 months



2013), for remaining 80%, nutrition-sensitive interventions/strategies are critical. Until recently, evidence base for nutrition-sensitive interventions was weak and there was little consensus on which interventions should be counted as nutrition-sensitive. The major challenge here is identifying or defining what constitutes a nutrition budget within these “nutrition-sensitive” schemes.

- **Arriving at precise estimates of budget outlays for nutrition-sensitive interventions is challenging:**

Relevant interventions in any particular nutrition-sensitive sector (such as agriculture, WASH or education) are spread widely across a large number of schemes that fall under many Union Ministries / state departments (varying from a minimum of 3 departments to a maximum of 16 departments across sectors). Tracking budgets for it is, therefore, a very complex and time consuming exercise. Ideally, following the global framework, one should be able to compute total budget outlays for each of the nutrition-sensitive sectors and then assign weights to those, so as to include only a part of a sector’s budget in the figure for nutrition budget. However, as an alternative approach in our analysis, we focused on selected nutrition-sensitive schemes and analysed their total budget outlays.

- **Difficulties in tracking / assessing total budget for nutrition in India:**

Given that nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions cut across several Ministries (and departments in the state governments), it is important to assess India's total budget for 'nutrition'. This would require the state governments to publish a lot more disaggregated budget data for a number of programmes and schemes, especially those in

which some of the components are relevant for nutrition; but this kind of break up is not available in public domain at present. With the relevant disaggregated information made available, it would be possible to arrive at how much is the country spending from its budgets towards nutrition, following a multi-sectoral approach. Also, in the absence of any overall / ballpark figure for total budget for nutrition, it becomes even more difficult to assess the budgetary priority for this important sector in India.

Policy asks

- The burden of undernutrition in India is high and hence the need for scaling up of public investment on nutrition assumes importance. Given the range of interventions required for addressing undernutrition, it is necessary that a common framework for multi-sector nutrition budget analysis is developed to support budget tracking for nutrition.
- Since the budgets for nutrition are spread across departments and schemes, there is a need to strengthen policy measures for ensuring allocation for all nutrition schemes/ programmes and also to ensure effective utilisation of funds in those.
- Nutrition interventions are embedded within larger programmes/schemes. To improve tracking of nutrition budgets, state governments need to publish a lot more disaggregated budget data for a number of programmes and schemes, especially those in which some of the components are relevant for nutrition.
- Budget tracking for nutrition-sensitive interventions needs to be strengthened further.



For details please refer to: Working Paper 4.

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