National Nutrition Symposium and Launch of the GOK-EU-UNICEF Maternal and Child Nutrition Programme

Step up Commitment to Scale Up Nutrition in Kenya

Concept note
Introduction

Nutrition is the basis for economic, social and human development. Good nutrition throughout the lifecycle is a prerequisite to good health, which adds quality to life and contributes to healthy aging. Malnutrition is, however, a significant public health problem in Kenya. There has been no significant change in the nutritional status of children less than five years since 1998. Approximately 2.8 million or one-third of Kenyan children below five years (approximately) are stunted (below average height for age). Consequently, Kenya was identified in the 2013 Lancet series on under nutrition as one of the 36 countries that carry 90 percent of the global burden of stunting. Malnutrition in children is particularly damaging since the effects are irreversible, resulting in permanent impairment of cognitive function and impacting on the quality of life, productivity of an individual and national economy. Regrettably, Kenya’s progress in reducing under nutrition has been very slow, at an average annual rate of 0.6–2.5 per cent.

The goal of Kenya Vision 2030 is to “transform Kenya into a globally competitive and prosperous nation with a high quality of life”. Unfortunately, malnutrition is amongst the biggest threats to this Vision and Kenya’s achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Malnutrition greatly affects Kenya’s socio-economic development and potential to reduce poverty. Economically, Kenya loses about Ksh 147 billion every year due to productivity losses as a result of malnutrition. The cost of malnutrition in Kenya is estimated to reach Ksh 3.2 trillion and 527,000 lives will be lost in the next 20 years (Nutrition Profiles 2010). Vision 2030 will not be realised unless the nutrition of women and children is prioritized in the national development programmes and strategies.

Investment in Nutrition: Scaling Up Nutrition

The Government of Kenya joined the global movement for Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) in November 2012 therefore committing to addressing under nutrition at scale in a multi sectoral approach. A package of high impact nutrition interventions has been adopted to accelerate the reduction of high malnutrition rates, and a National Nutrition Action Plan to implement these strategies developed. However, coverage of these interventions remains very low due to lack of adequate funds for implementation. The highest level of commitment in Kenya is needed to address stunting at scale not only through the Ministry of Health given that nutrition specific programmes can only reduce stunting by 30-40 per cent but through ministries of agriculture, trade, education, devolution and water/irrigation.

The movement has however drawn attention and interest from diverse stakeholders over a short duration of time, thus demonstrating its potential. There has been a number of achievements within the nutrition sector, key among them being limited funding at both national and county level, lack of prioritization of nutrition issues at the county level, inadequate advocacy capacity at all levels, poor inter-sectoral linkages to address malnutrition and low demand and awareness of the nutrition services. This calls for intensified advocacy at all levels. The Government recognizes that additional resources and strengthened systems are required to scale up nutrition interventions and end all forms of malnutrition. However, the commitment to addressing malnutrition wholesome is a challenge.

The meeting therefore aims to secure the support of high-level leadership from government and development agencies to champion the Scaling up Nutrition agenda in Kenya, with a view to increase visibility of the enormous challenge of malnutrition and to enhance multi-sectoral collaboration in addressing it. It is noteworthy that countries such as Rwanda that have succeeded in bringing down levels of malnutrition substantially have achieved this with support from high-level political/government leadership.

Purpose of the National Nutrition Symposium

i. Sensitize/update high level nutrition stakeholders from government, donors, UN agencies and development partners on progress in the scale up of nutrition efforts in the country. Share challenges, opportunities and lessons learnt in efforts to use a multi-sectoral approach to address malnutrition in the country.

ii. Advocate for commitment to increased funding support to the nutrition sector by donors, development partners and the government as a means to increase productivity, enhance economic development, and improve the growth, health and survival of children and realization of vision 2030.


iv. Share the outcome and recommendations of the International Conference on Nutrition and the Scaling Up Nutrition Global Gathering and reflect on the country’s commitments deriving from these meetings.

v. Showcase key achievements and best practices in Scaling up Nutrition, policies and implementation of maternal and young child nutrition programmes at national and county levels.

vi. Sensitize and support county teams to establish multi-stakeholder forums for coordinated scale up of nutrition initiatives at county level.
Partners

- The Presidency
- The National Treasury
- Secretary to the Cabinet
- Ministry of Devolution and Planning
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of the Environment, Water and Natural Resource
- Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries
- Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government and Industrialization and Enterprise Development
- Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Services