



**IMPROVING NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA
AN EU-UNICEF JOINT ACTION**

Globally, 54 million children under five years of age are suffering from chronic malnutrition

This is a silent emergency with devastating and far-reaching effects, which is robbing millions of children of their full potential for growth and development. The **European Union (EU)** and the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** have joined forces to improve nutrition security.

- More than a third of children under 5 years of age in Africa are stunted: they are too short for their age because of long-term insufficient nutrient intake and frequent infections.
- 20% of under-fives weigh too little for their age. This is a general reflection of malnutrition.
- 13% of babies have a low birth weight of less than 2,500 grams.
- 9% of under-fives are wasted, meaning that they rapidly lose weight because of illness or lack of food and are at high risk of death.
- Nearly half of pregnant women and preschool children are anaemic. Anaemia in pregnancy can lead to low birth weight and other poor pregnancy outcomes, while anaemia in young children negatively affects their mental and physical development.

These figures are even higher in or within a number of countries.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF UNDERNUTRITION

Poor fetal and young child growth negatively impacts a child throughout life, resulting in poorer academic achievement, reduced earnings, and increased risk of disease and death. Chronic undernutrition in the early years is linked to 0.7 grade loss in schooling, a 7-month delay in starting school and more than 22% (and can go up to 45%) reduction in lifetime earnings. Chronic malnutrition lowers the prospects of countries' economic growth due to (1) direct losses in productivity from poor physical status, (2) indirect losses from poor cognition and schooling deficits, and (3) losses from increased health care costs. In all, malnutrition can result in 2-3% losses in Gross Domestic Product (World Bank, 2006, "Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development").



WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

Nutrition Security is more than just food security. It is the outcome of good health, a health environment, and good caring practices.

Conversely, malnutrition is not just the result of food insecurity but rather of poor infant and young child feeding and care practices, poor maternal health and nutrition leading to low birth weight newborns, of poor access to health services as well as of inadequate hygiene conditions and practices.

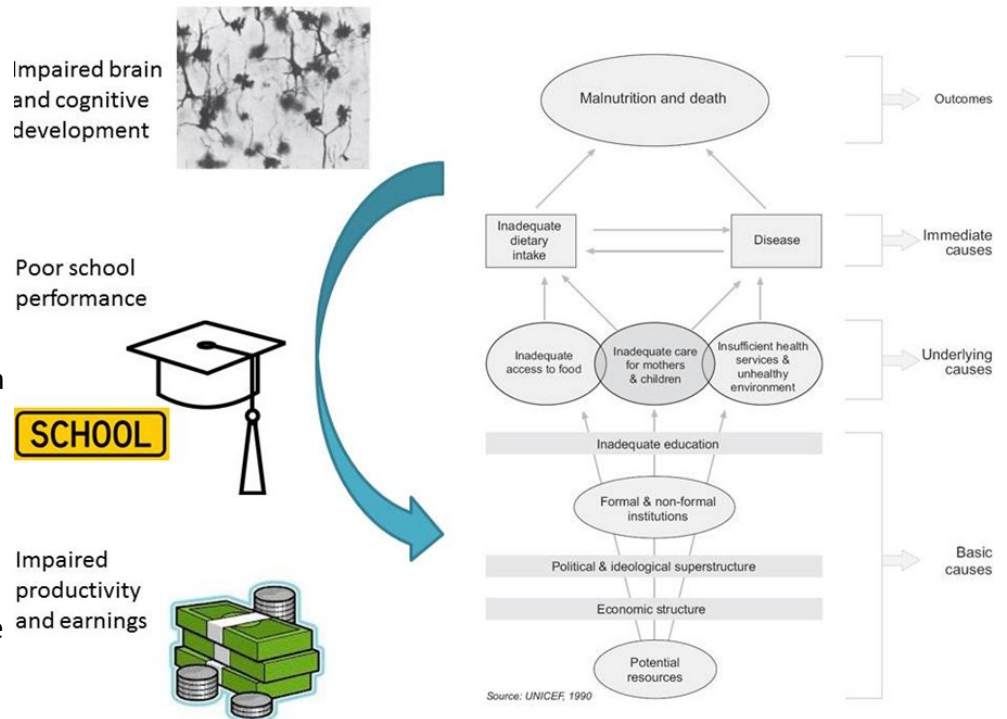
The risk of stunting increases significantly if the quality of complementary feeding after six months of age is not adequate – even if a mother continues breastfeeding her child. This needs to receive special attention. A framework of the relationship between poverty, household food insecurity and other underlying and immediate causes of malnutrition is shown in the following illustration (UNICEF, 1990, “Modified Framework”)

The reduction of stunting and other manifestations of deficits in the nutritional status of pregnant women and children can break the negative cycle of malnutrition, generating human and social capital that fuel national economic development. Nutritional status is a “marker of progress and also a maker of progress – and a key to more sustainable development”, says Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director.

ROUTES TO BETTER NUTRITION

The window of opportunity for addressing malnutrition is from pregnancy to the first two years of life. The damage to health, physical growth, brain development, intelligence, educability, and productivity are largely irreversible after this period. Interventions must thus be focused on this window period (Shrimpton et. al. 2001. *Pediatrics*; 107: e75).

Reducing malnutrition will involve nutrition-specific interventions as well as nutrition sensitive development.



Improving nutrition is a precondition to achieving the goals of eradicating poverty and hunger, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating disease, empowering women and achieving universal primary education.

Global evidence suggests that reduction of stunting requires investments: (i) in direct nutrition-specific interventions focusing on pregnant women and children aged less than two years; and (ii) in broader multi-sectoral nutrition-sensitive approaches to development that act to counter the determinants of malnutrition. This will be done by: (a) promoting agriculture and food security to improve the availability, access to and consumption of nutritious foods; (b) improving social protection (including emergency relief); and (c) by ensuring access to health care (including maternal and child health care, water, hygiene and sanitation, immunization, education, family planning numerous others).

Ensuring adequate nutrition during the critical ‘1000 days window of opportunity’ from pregnancy to age two can prevent long-term and irreversible damage to children’s health and cognitive and physical development. Adequate nutrition is shown to strengthen a child’s ability to fight off common childhood illnesses that too often lead to death, while also increasing life-long educational and economic opportunities.

THE EU-UNICEF AFRICA'S NUTRITION SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

To help fight the widespread and growing problem of malnutrition, the EU and UNICEF have launched Africa's Nutrition Security Partnership (ANSP) to improve nutrition security among women and young children on the continent. The ANSP initiative is supporting four African countries directly – Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali and Uganda – under a four-year programme (2011-2015). These countries bear a heavy burden of child malnutrition.

WHAT THE ANSP DOES IN THE FOCUS COUNTRIES

- Improve nutrition security for child survival, growth and development during the first '1000 days window of opportunity' including pregnancy
- Scale up nutrition high-impact interventions for women and children in selected areas of the targeted countries
- Strengthen countries' delivery and information systems on nutrition



This project focuses on both high level policy engagement as well as on evidenced-based nutrition-specific interventions and integrating nutrition goals into broader health, development and agricultural efforts. Nutrition-specific interventions include promotion of use of available foods and resources, breastfeeding promotion, vitamin and mineral supplements, appropriate complementary foods, fortification of staple foods and integrated management of acute malnutrition.

To achieve this, UNICEF is working with governments and partners targeting one million children and 600,000 pregnant and lactating women in the four focus countries.

The European Union has provided a €20 million grant as a vital contribution to a wider multi-donor initiative, This sound investment will greatly support countries' sustainable development as well as their children's health and education.

WHAT THE ANSP DOES BEYOND THE FOCUS COUNTRIES

The project is also operating at continental and regional levels to establish systems and links with other sectors to address the multi-dimensional, underlying causes of malnutrition, and to create an environment of pro-nutrition policy and programmes, which is needed to sustain improvements in nutrition in the long term. A key component is the engagement with the Africa Union and the African Regional Economic Communities to position Nutrition on the development agenda and to put in place pro-nutrition policies in a wide range of sectors.

BUILDING MULTI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Sustained improvements in nutrition require coordination at the national, regional, and global levels. Coordinating multiple sectors, including health, education, agriculture and water and sanitation, around nutrition must be a priority for governments and development partners. The initiative operates at three levels:

CONTINENTAL LEVEL

- Support the African Task Force for Food and Nutrition Development in the reviewing of the African Regional Nutrition Strategy and position nutrition security on the African development agenda
- Developing an advocacy strategy which targets high level policy makers in mainstreaming the nutrition in the agenda of relevant discussions

REGIONAL LEVEL:

- Inform policy dialogue, strengthen knowledge and support policy development on nutrition security
- Promote integration between relevant sectors (e.g., health and agriculture)
- Build on existing coordination mechanisms in partnership with REACH (WHO, WFP, FAO and UNICEF) as well as other regional institutions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West and Central Africa and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern and Southern Africa as well as the NEPAD, ECSA, SADC and EAC

NATIONAL LEVEL (BURKINA FASO, ETHIOPIA, MALI AND UGANDA):

- Strengthen national nutrition plans and programmes to improve multi-sectoral coordination towards better nutrition outcomes in line with Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) global movement
- Review and improve behaviour and social change communication, and training for nutrition service providers
- Improve capacity or process for nutrition information gathering for a stronger evidence base and better informed national policies and programmes
- Communication for behaviour and social change and counseling for Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), particularly appropriate complementary feeding
- Support towards scaling up nutrition interventions at community level

The presence of the initiative in each of the targeted countries creates opportunities for cooperation and pooling of resources to support national coordination, and scaling-up efforts that accelerate the programmes for reduction of maternal and child malnutrition. Strengthening capacity of local and national institutions in data analysis and interpretation will contribute to a stronger evidence base approach, which will in return provide the basis for better informed national policies and programmes.



The programme aims to strengthen capacity for nutrition planning and coordination. Training course and materials will be developed to target managers of various sectors, strengthening their skills for planning, implementing and supervising nutrition programmes as well as coordinating nutrition-related activities across multiple sectors.

The range of activities mentioned above will enable households to have better access to nutrition services, and better knowledge and skills to improve nutritional status of pregnant women and young children.

ACTION AND IMPACT

Through this partnership and by supporting the implementation of sound, evidence-based interventions, the EU and UNICEF aim to contribute to the achievement of the MDG 1, 4, 5 and 8 targets related to nutrition in West and East Africa ensuring that the rights of all children and women are protected from the adverse consequences of malnutrition. The specific objective is to improve the institutional environment at continental, regional and national levels contributing to a reduction in maternal and child malnutrition in Africa.

The impact of the initiative will go beyond the four targeted countries with potential to support successful approaches across the continent and ensure that other countries in Africa benefit from the development of materials, tools and capacity.

The Four Pillars of the Initiative:

1. **Upstream Policy & Nutrition Security Awareness.** Adoption of a harmonized framework of goals, targets, policies, strategies and tools by regional institutions and their respective member states.
2. **Capacity Development.** Enhanced capacities at all levels to address maternal and child malnutrition in collaboration with national and regional institutions through a strong nutrition community network.
3. **Data Analysis & Knowledge Sharing.** Strengthened nutrition security information systems, data collection and analysis including monitoring and evaluation with effective mechanisms for knowledge sharing and management.
4. **Scaling Up Interventions.** Improved infant, young child and maternal nutrition through at-scale implementation of key direct interventions.





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