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Economic Potential of Nutrition and Growth: New Focus at World Economic Forum

As leaders seek innovative models for change, improving nutrition through a multi-partnership approach proves to be a smart investment

Global leaders recognize the potential impact of investment in early-child nutrition through a series of nutrition and food security related events at the World Economic Forum, highlighting opportunities for progress through partnership

Davos, Switzerland [January 26, 2012] – Nutrition is being highlighted as central to building stability, resilience to crisis and sustainable progress in global health and development through a series of nutrition and food security related events taking place today in Davos, Switzerland. As leading economic innovators, global decision makers, country leaders and representatives of some of the world’s most influential organizations are gathered this week at the World Economic Forum (WEF) they will be focusing on effective solutions to some of the world’s most pressing challenges.

Beginning with a breakfast reception hosted by Royal DSM and Sight and Life to celebrate the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and the important role of partnerships in building sustainable solutions to address undernutrition, other events today will include, “Ensuring Food Security,” featuring new models of collaboration and innovation driving investment in food and nutrition security, as well as a session on “Increasing livelihoods by making nutrition accessible and effective.” This series of events gives the influential leaders at Davos an opportunity to highlight the crucial importance of investment in early child nutrition.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) provides a focus for discussions on food security and nutrition at Davos. WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran said, “I have seen that the battle against malnutrition is winnable through bold collaboration and effective action.” She added, “Beating malnutrition is a powerful investment - transforming human potential and fueling economic growth and development.”

The Executive Director of UNICEF, Anthony Lake, has been appointed by the UN Secretary-General to chair the multi-stakeholder group which is leading the SUN Movement. “In a time of strong economic challenges, leaders are looking hard to find cost-effective investments in economic and societal growth,”

Lake said. “Investing in human nutrition – especially among disadvantaged people in the 1000 days from pregnancy to the age of two - promotes progress in all areas of global health and development, builds resilience to crisis, and sustains impact for future generations. With almost one third of all children experiencing undernutrition early in life, this is a powerful and cost effective investment in the future of these children – and their nations.”

The SUN Movement is built upon the principle that real progress can be made by supporting country-led efforts to improve nutrition through cooperative engagement by partners working across sectors towards a common goal. The extraordinary global momentum built around SUN over the past year is evidence of the growing recognition that investment in nutrition is central to reaching global health and development targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The fact that nutrition is being highlighted as an essential issue at the World Economic Forum is an example of the SUN Movement’s inclusive approach, which recognizes that a range of sectors and partners have a role to play in scaling up nutrition. Governments are developing costed national nutrition plans and setting up multi-stakeholder nutrition platforms that bring together civil society, business, the UN system, development partners and researchers to develop nutrition strategy and implement nutrition actions. Professionals from agriculture, social protection and education are combining forces as they increasingly see good nutrition as an important part of their programs and an indicator of their success.

“As the SUN Movement enters 2012 with renewed energy, conviction and commitment, networks of stakeholders will work to ensure the best possible contribution to scaling up nutrition,” said David Nabarro, the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for Food Security and Nutrition and Coordinator of the SUN Movement. “This means sound, principled, people-private-public partnerships that empower societies for optimal nutrition. Partners will learn from each other in a transparent and constructive way – understanding constraints, sharing experiences and ensuring that people everywhere access the nourishment that is vital for a full life. At all times we will focus on responding to requests from countries as they empower their people through good nutrition.”

He added, “In the last 18 months, governments of 26 countries have committed to scaling up nutrition and achieving visible results in the next 5 years. The business, civil society, donor, UN and research partners in the SUN Movement are aligning in support. We recognize that good nutrition empowers societies for equitable growth and innovative transformation. Denial, or even delay, is inexcusable.”

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