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What makes good nutrition so important?

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition results not just from a lack of sufficient and adequately nutritious and safe food, but from a host of intertwined factors linking health-care, education, sanitation and hygiene, access to food and resources, women's empowerment and more.

It's a fundamental right

Every woman, man and child has the right to adequate food and nutrition⁵. This right is enshrined in several international human rights and other treaties. Most notably, Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states clearly that the "right to an adequate standard of living includes food, housing, clothing." Moreover, article 11(2) recognises the "fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger".

Additionally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child obligates states parties "to combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious food and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution" (Article 24(2)(c)).

It is the bedrock for human wellbeing and potential

An estimated 45 per cent of all under-five mortalities are linked to malnutrition⁶. For children who survive, the long term effects of malnutrition are devastating if not addressed: diminished cognitive and physical development; reduced productive capacity and poor health. In fact, stunted children have an increased risk of becoming overweight or obese later in life.

For these reasons, the first 1,000 days - from a mother's pregnancy to her child's second birthday - are pivotal in determining a girl or boy's destiny. Good nutrition builds strong immune systems, supercharging children's chances of survival and protecting them their whole lives.

⁵ The Right to Food is realised when every woman, man and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restricted sense, which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (1999, p.2).

⁶ Black, Robert E, et al., 2013. Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries. *The Lancet*, Volume 382, Issue 9890, pp. 427 - 451.



Good nutrition makes cents

The economic effects of poor nutrition play out with a domino effect on a child, their community and their country. Malnourished children are often sick more often, less present in school and less able to learn as their well-nourished classmates. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that reduced school attendance of stunted children results in reduced earning capacities equal to an average of 22 per cent loss of yearly income in adulthood. At the macro level, the economic consequences represent yearly losses of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) around 10 per cent. In Asia and Africa, the annual GDP losses from low weight, poor child growth, and micronutrient deficiencies average 11 per cent — greater than the loss experienced during the 2008–2010 financial crisis.⁷

Conversely, investing in nutrition has the potential to help break the poverty cycle and stimulate economic development. Every dollar invested can yield a return of 16 dollars.⁸

The scale of malnutrition in 2016

- 2 billion people experience micronutrient malnutrition⁹
- 1.9 billion adults are overweight or obese⁹
- 156 million children under 5 are too short for their age (stunted); 50 million do not weigh enough for their height (wasted) and 41 million are overweight; none of these children are growing healthily⁹
- 794 million people are estimated to be calorie deficient⁹
- 1 in 12 adults worldwide have type II diabetes⁹
- In 14 countries less than half of all children under 5 escape both stunting and wasting.⁹

⁷ International Food Policy Research Institute. Global Nutrition Report 2016: From Promise to Impact: Ending Malnutrition by 2030. Washington, D.C. 2016.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ UNICEF - WHO - World Bank Group joint child malnutrition estimates, 2016 edition.

Good nutrition: An essential ingredient to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Malnutrition (which includes several forms of undernutrition as well as overweight and obesity) impairs people's productivity, which impairs national growth. In this sense, malnutrition will represent an often invisible impediment to the successful achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹⁰ Good nutrition is both an outcome of development and the seed that will grow future developments.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has committed all governments to comprehensive, integrated and universal transformations which include ending hunger and malnutrition by 2030.

They are galvanising action to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Whilst the ambition to 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture' is captured in Sustainable Development Goal 2, at least 12 of the 17 Goals contain indicators that are highly relevant to nutrition.

The SDGs build on the six global nutrition targets as agreed by the World Health Assembly (WHA). These targets sit at the heart of the 2014 Rome Declaration and Framework for Action which were the result of the Second International Conference on

Nutrition (ICN2). The Rome Declaration calls for the UN system, including the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), to work more effectively together to support national and regional efforts. Responding to this, the CFS established an Open-Ended Working Group on Nutrition in October 2015 to develop a clear vision.

In April 2016, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2016-2025 the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, in a bid to intensify action to end hunger and eradicate malnutrition worldwide, and to ensure universal access to healthier and more sustainable diets – for every woman, man and child, everywhere.

In August 2016, the Government of Brazil held a Nutrition for Growth (N4G) event building on the commitments and agreed actions by UN Member States contained in the 'Nutrition for Growth Compact', which mobilised USD 4 billion at the first N4G Summit in 2013.

Indeed, capitalising on this global momentum, coupled with adequate and sustained investments in nutrition, aimed at ending poverty and hunger, will be crucial for reaching the full potential of the 2030 Agenda.

■ Number of indicators highly relevant to nutrition
 ■ Number of indicators not highly relevant to nutrition



Source: Global Nutrition Report 2016

¹⁰ Nutrition and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, UNSCN, 2014.

Taking action

The precious potential of millions of children can be unlocked with good nutrition. Good nutrition helps develop strong brains and bodies, allowing this generation the opportunity to not just survive, but thrive, and reach their full potential in life. Good nutrition for children impacts everyone. It fuels not just children and their futures but also our economies. As children grow strong and resilient and women are empowered, so do communities and countries, thus ending the cycle of poverty. Over the past decade, global and country recognition of the value in scaling up nutrition for the health and future development of children, and therefore societies, has grown exponentially. The importance of a concerted approach is now widely accepted, involving:

- **Multiple stakeholders**, led by governments, supported by UN agencies, civil society, business, academia and donors
- **Multiple sectors**, including health, agriculture, women's empowerment, planning, education and more
- **At multiple levels**, from the highest levels of government to local community leaders.

While the world has made progress in combatting undernutrition, this progress has been too slow and uneven across regions, population groups and genders – in the face of a changing climate, population growth and accelerated urbanisation, growing economic inequality and humanitarian crises.

In addition, the number of overweight people has increased tremendously in almost all countries worldwide. All stakeholders need to come to grips with the “new normal” of dealing with malnutrition, in all its forms, in the same place, at the same time. This is now a problem for nearly half of all countries. Many SUN Countries will need to improve the efficiency of their investments and policies by identifying and implementing double-duty actions that tackle more than one form of malnutrition at once. Without adequate and sustained investments in good nutrition, the full potential of the SDGs will not be realised.

In this context, the SUN Movement is a catalyst for change. The experiences from its members are contributing to strengthened evidence on effective actions required for achieving impact, and in shaping an enabling environment for good nutrition – fit to ensure nobody is left behind and people everywhere benefit from good nutrition.