



**World Health
Organization**

unicef 
unite for children



22 October 2008

To: All Country Representatives

Dear Colleagues,

Undernutrition is the major contributing cause of 3.5 million child deaths and 11% of the total global burden of disease. Lack of access to adequate food and good nutrition among the poorest undermines countries' development potential and threatens global public health and human security. With the recent rise in food prices, the UN Secretary General drew the world's attention to the risk of widespread hunger, undernutrition and social unrest on an unprecedented scale, also referring to an appeal launched by FAO in December 2007. It is increasingly clear that targets for the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger (MDG1) will not be achieved without a decisive, integrated effort by partners. The recent rise in food prices threatens to worsen undernutrition significantly, and makes the need for such a decisive effort acute.

The causes of child undernutrition (food insecurity, poor health and inappropriate care) are known – predictable - and preventable. Intensified action is needed to prevent and mitigate the negative health and nutrition consequences of food crises, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (MDG1), to halve the prevalence of underweight among under-fives (MDG1, Target 3) and to reduce child and maternal mortality as well as HIV, TB and malaria (MDGs 4, 5 and 6). This requires scaling-up of proven interventions that, delivered together, can rapidly improve nutrition.

We, the Directors-General of FAO and WHO and the Executive Directors of UNICEF and WFP, are committed to a renewed effort against child hunger and undernutrition: REACH. Building on work done under the Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative (ECHUI), REACH is geared to supporting countries to intensify action through government-led, solution-focused partnerships involving the UN, civil society and private sectors.

The goal of REACH is a documented reduction, by 2015, in the proportion of underweight children globally, i.e. from a prevalence of 32% underweight children under the age of five in 1990 to 16% in 2015.

The four expected outcomes of the initiative are:

- (1) increased awareness of the underlying problem of hunger and undernutrition and of the potential solutions;
- (2) strengthened, resourced and effectively monitored national policies and programmes;
- (3) increased capacity at the international, national, community and household levels for action; and
- (4) increased efficiency and accountability of the global efforts to reduce child hunger and undernutrition.

To support country action, REACH is promoting interventions of proven effectiveness, while considering the local context, in five priority areas relating to food security, health and care: (i) improving infant and young child feeding, (ii) treating severe acute malnutrition, (iii) increasing micronutrient intake, (iv) improving hygiene and parasite control, and (v) increasing food availability and accessibility.

REACH is developing a system to capture and share practical knowledge, at a global level, on how to implement these interventions, at scale and in an integrated manner, in diverse settings. While REACH is based on known solutions and its goals are part of our agencies' core businesses, it is not about 'business as usual'. The partnership focuses on bringing about a rapid improvement within three to five years, to complement and be a platform for longer-term efforts.

A small inter-agency team of senior staff members from FAO, WHO, UNICEF and WFP has been established, working with NGO and private sector partners, other agencies of the UN system and in alignment with the World Bank, to assist UN Country Teams and partners to create deliberate operational synergies and coherence, systematically apply successful practice, and focus advocacy messages. The inter-agency REACH team, hosted by WFP in Rome, is coordinated by Denise Costa-Coitinho who is seconded from WHO to this effort. The REACH inter-agency team can be contacted at REACH@reach.partnership.org.

The REACH team can help to analyze readiness, gaps and opportunities to scale up key interventions; and support joint action planning and execution in programming, resourcing, advocacy, and results tracking. Innovative processes for this support are being tested already in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Mauritania by REACH and also through the WHO-led inter-agency Landscape Analysis in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guatemala, Madagascar, Peru and Timor Leste. Experience in these countries confirms the importance of coordinated approaches in overcoming fragmentation of efforts and in elevating maternal, infant and child nutrition on national agendas.


This letter follows up earlier individual agency communications regarding inter-agency collaboration on nutrition and the food price crisis response. The individual agencies' nutrition divisions or agreed institutional mechanisms will remain responsible for this

initiative and your point of contact to access REACH resources, materials and information.


Many of our country and regional offices are engaged in valuable and innovative efforts with partners to implement effective programmes around nutrition goals. Your work is essential, and we are counting on you to contribute to joint agency efforts to support governments to move towards a joint nutrition strategy and to ensure that proven food and nutrition interventions are mainstreamed in your countries' United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and in your work with partners.

Harnessing existing experience and commitment, we are convinced that we can make a real and durable improvement in child nutrition. As members of UN Country and Regional teams, you are in a unique position to make a real difference. This is one of our highest priorities and you will have our full, coordinated support.


Sincerely,



Jacques Diouf
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FAO



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Director-General
WHO



Ann Veneman
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Josette Sheeran
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WFP