



Nutrition and the MDGs: accelerating progress towards 2015

Today close to a billion people still suffer from hunger, and at least **225 million** of the world's children under the age of five suffer from acute and chronic undernutrition, a condition that is life-threatening and undermines their health and development. The resulting mortality, morbidity and loss of productivity impedes social and economic development worldwide.

Undernutrition is caused by inadequate food intake and disease. The most vulnerable are those whose nutritional needs are higher and social status is lowest: young children, pregnant and lactating women, the sick and the elderly.

Malnutrition results from a combination of problems related to poor diet, ill-health and inappropriate care. It is closely associated with poverty. Nutrition is linked to most if not all Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are themselves closely interlinked and the right to food and good nutrition for all is fundamental to achieving the MDGs.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (MDG1) – The prevalence of underweight children under five years of age is an indicator for this MDG. Malnutrition contributes in turn to poverty and hunger.

Achieving universal primary education (MDG2) – Malnutrition, and in particular micronutrient deficiency, such as iodine deficiency, lowers children's ability to attend and perform at school and diminishes their chances to achieve a complete education.

Promote gender equality and empower women (MDG3) – Since women play a key role in family nutrition - breastfeeding, producing, buying, preparing and distributing family foods, taking care of children and the sick, visiting health centres and ensuring hygiene - good nutrition contributes to women's empowerment.

Reduce child mortality (MDG4) – Severe undernutrition accounts for **one million** deaths every year. More than half (53%) of all deaths in children under five years of age are attributed to undernutrition as the underlying cause, as common childhood diseases become fatal in undernourished children.

Improve maternal health (MDG5) – Maternal undernutrition contributes to maternal mortality, ill-health and other complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG6) – Undernutrition makes individuals more susceptible to disease, which in turn increases nutritional needs and weakens the capacity of the body to assimilate food. Nutritional care is therefore a key dimension of successful clinical treatment of HIV/AIDS patients.

Ensure environmental sustainability (MDG7) – There is increased recognition that the health of people and of the environment are closely associated. Environmental health and sustainable diets are essential to ensure good nutrition and sustainable management of biodiversity and environment.

Develop a global partnership for development (MDG8) – Given the multi-sectoral nature of nutrition, sustainable improvement of nutrition requires the involvement of stakeholders from different institutional and sectoral backgrounds. Nutrition is therefore a key entry point for a global partnership for development.



We know what needs to be done, how to do it, and now more than ever, it is time to act!

Many countries have made significant progress in fighting malnutrition and there is increasing evidence for successful interventions. A Road Map for Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) has been developed to accelerate nutrition improvement particularly in high burden countries. The Scaling-Up Nutrition Initiative is a product of a large consultative process which involved various stakeholders, including the UN agencies with mandate in nutrition.

The UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) urgently calls on all Member States, United Nations agencies, donors, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector to:

- (1) **Prioritize nutrition** as an official national development goal and as an essential component of both the right to food and right to health, as recommended by the UNSCN to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations in 2005. This requires governments to create an enabling environment through improved policies, governance and accountability to their citizens.
- (2) **Scale-up and adapt** direct nutrition interventions that have proven effective to support malnourished children and their families. It is urgent to build on existing efforts and experience, to review and disseminate good practices and to ensure integration of relevant sectoral interventions at community and local level.
- (3) **Mainstream nutrition** in all developmental and humanitarian programmes with a view to protect and promote nutrition and ensure a holistic approach at all levels (from local to global). Poverty and disaster risk reduction strategies, as well as climate change strategies, should integrate nutrition interventions in order to be more effective.
- (4) **Advocate and mobilize** long-term financial investments and resources for nutrition by all actors including the Scaling-Up Nutrition Initiative and identify nutrition as a priority for innovative financing.
- (5) **Ensure effective** monitoring and impact assessment of the food and nutrition situation, disaggregated by gender and socioeconomic background, and relate relevant indicators to the achievement of the MDGs.

Failing to take action on undernutrition incurs annual losses to national economic development of at least US\$ 360 billion. These costs come from the loss of productivity, education and higher health costs. Child malnutrition undermines national education programmes and can cause depletion of GDP by up to 3%. Malnutrition's vast range of consequences also has a heavy weight on national health expenditures. To summarize, malnutrition costs money to governments and hampers the socioeconomic development of countries.

2015 is drawing near. At the current pace the MDGs will not be achieved in most countries. A change of approach and a major acceleration is required. Nutrition is the entry point through which current efforts can be catalysed and existing experiences and capacities built upon. Concerted and joint action for nutrition from various stakeholders and sectors can reduce levels of undernutrition and ultimately reduce hunger and poverty and lay solid ground for progress in all other domains of development.