



UNEQUAL PORTIONS



Save the Children

Ending malnutrition for every last child

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Good nutrition – a healthy, balanced, adequate diet – is a matter of life or death. And the difference between surviving or thriving.

It is essential for a healthy immune system, to protect against disease throughout life. And it's crucial for a country's inclusive and sustainable development.

But progress in tackling malnutrition is far too slow. Millions of children are missing out on adequate nutrition because of who they are and where they live. They are discriminated against because of their ethnicity or disability; they are excluded because of their parents' lack of income or after being forced from their homes.

This report tells the story of these forgotten children. And it sets out what is required to ensure every last child gets the nutrition they need. If we are serious about creating a world where no child is malnourished, we must tackle the discrimination and exclusion they face.

Save the Children has launched a new campaign to help ensure that every last child survives and thrives. We will work directly with excluded children, coming up with innovative solutions and delivering world class programmes. We will advocate for increased resources for nutrition. We will challenge the laws, norms and policies that have allowed malnutrition and discrimination to persist. And we will campaign with and for the world's forgotten children.

The need for action has never been more pressing. Our new research shows that, despite a global commitment to eradicate malnutrition by 2030, on current trends there will be 129 million children under five with stunted growth worldwide by that date. And even in 100 years from now, without a dramatic change of course there will still be millions of malnourished children in the world.

MALNUTRITION – PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS

The world has made progress in addressing undernutrition. The number of children with stunted growth has fallen by more than a third since 1990.

But progress has not been fast enough. Every year, 3.1 million children die because of undernutrition. Malnutrition is a daily global emergency. In the world today, nearly a quarter of all children under five – 159 million children – are stunted.¹ A lack of food, poor health or unsanitary environments mean these children are not benefiting from the nutrients they need to develop to their full potential.

Without a dramatically different approach the world won't meet its nutrition goals. The world has pledged to reduce stunting by 40% by 2025 and eliminate all forms of malnutrition by 2030. But if we carry on as we are, that simply won't happen. Unless the world dramatically changes course, malnutrition is here to stay.

While a reduction of 30 million over 16 years in the number of malnourished children² signifies some progress, it is unacceptably slow. **By 2030 there will still be 129 million stunted children.** Low-income countries will account for more than a quarter of this global burden.

What's more, even at the turn of the next century – 70 years after the deadline to end malnutrition – we are still likely to see 24 million children with stunted growth. Without a concerted change, the world is set to live through another century of wasted potential, damaging children's education, life chances, income and productivity – and with serious consequences for the global economy.

At the same time, the number of overweight children is increasing. There are 41 million overweight under-fives in the world today – 10 million more than two decades ago.³ This is a worrying trend, which will lead to greater morbidity and mortality, and will have significant implications for the global economy. Yet it's a trend that could and should be reversed.

HOW EQUAL HAS PROGRESS BEEN?

There are stark differences in malnutrition rates between countries. In 44 developing countries – out of a total of 115 with available data – 30% or more of children suffer from stunted growth. In three of these countries – Burundi, Eritrea and Timor-Leste – over half of children are stunted, and in 13 countries the problem has actually got worse since 2000.

Within most developing countries it is predicted that it will take much longer to eliminate malnutrition in excluded groups of children than among the best-performing groups or in the rest of the country – a continuation of the unequal progress that the world has experienced since 1990.⁴

We know progress is possible. But progress on nutrition has often failed to include all children. Ghana, Peru and the Republic of Congo have seen a significant reduction in stunting in recent years. However, with the exception of rural areas in Ghana, disadvantaged groups in these countries have lagged behind the more advantaged ones, leading to an increasing gap between the two. Peru, in particular, has growing inequalities in stunting rates between regions, between rural and urban areas and between ethnic groups.

WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE MORE VULNERABLE TO MALNUTRITION THAN OTHERS?

Discrimination and exclusion are helping to create these inequalities. Where a child lives largely determines their access to services, education and food, their cultural and social practices, their family's income – and ultimately their nutrition levels. Our data shows that, on average, children living in rural areas are 1.37 times more likely to be stunted than children living in urban areas.⁵ In reality, these global averages mask even greater inequalities between rural and urban areas.

Family income has a significant influence over a child's nutrition. So it comes as no surprise that the poorest fifth of children have considerably higher stunting and wasting rates than the richest fifth. Across developing countries and regions, young children in the poorest 20% of families are more than twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday as children from families in the wealthiest fifth of the population.⁶

Exacerbating the problem of global malnutrition is the strongest ever recorded El Niño, bringing

drought to 15 countries and affecting more than 60 million people. Violence and persecution have also fuelled the worst refugee crisis since the second world war, forcing people from their homes and making it more difficult for them to get the basic essentials they need to survive.

So while there has never been greater worldwide commitment to tackling malnutrition – with 57 countries signing up to the Scaling Up Nutrition movement⁷ and a global goal agreed to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030 – these global trends make the problem increasingly pressing.

HOW IS EXCLUSION CONTRIBUTING TO MALNUTRITION?

The drivers of malnutrition are well known. They include a child's dietary intake and health, household food security, care practices, the broader health environment in which people live, poverty, the political context and environmental factors such as climate change.

These drivers can intersect and overlap, exacerbating the exclusion of certain groups of children. For example, children living in remote areas may not have access to healthcare. Disabled children living in these areas may be even less able to get the services they need – particularly if they require specialist care.

HOW TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS FOR ALL

States have a binding obligation, enshrined in international law, to respect, protect and realise children's right to survival. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges states to do everything they can to prevent children from dying. To meet this commitment, states need to tackle malnutrition. Yet, many countries lack a legal framework that promotes child survival, and those that do often fail to implement it.⁸

Governments have signed up to numerous global nutrition targets. While welcome, these goals are often the result of political negotiations rather than calculations based on trends in nutrition and the context in which countries are operating. It is therefore not surprising that the world is not on track to meet any of the six World Health Assembly nutrition targets. If we want to see real and equitable progress, **these global goals must be translated**

into national targets, with adequate resources and plans that lay out how each country will reach its goals for all groups of society.

Economic growth can contribute to improved nutrition, and in low-income countries it is seen as an essential weapon in the fight against malnutrition.⁹ However, there is a complex relationship between economic growth and nutrition, and growth alone is not sufficient to tackle malnutrition. Policies that take account of the specific country context are also essential – necessitating a national contextual analysis to understand both the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition and how to overcome them.

Commitments to address malnutrition should begin with the moral and legal imperative for the right to food and nutrition for all. Countries that have legally recognised the right to food tend to be more likely to implement programmes tackling child nutrition.¹⁰ The values of empowerment, equity, universality and accountability should also be at the centre of efforts to reduce malnutrition.

Policies that can contribute to inclusively addressing malnutrition through a multi-sectoral approach include child-sensitive social protection; universal health coverage; improved water, sanitation and hygiene; education and building resilience; and enhancing food security and livelihoods.

A decade of action is required to end malnutrition.¹¹ The second Nutrition for Growth event marks the moment to prioritise and invest to end malnutrition for every last child.

Save the Children recommends that governments:

1. Undertake a multi-sectoral contextual analysis to understand:
 - the national drivers of and trends in malnutrition
 - which policies and practices will best address malnutrition
 - which groups of people are most marginalised and vulnerable to malnutrition and the barriers they face.
2. Set national nutrition targets, aligned to global goals, which include specific targets for all groups of society, based on national contexts and trends.
3. Put in place appropriate policies and plans to reach those targets, for all groups of society. This should form the basis of a ‘leave no one behind strategy’ – ensuring malnutrition is reduced across all groups of society.
4. Work with relevant sectors and stakeholders – including donors, academics, civil society and business – throughout the planning and policy process on tackling malnutrition, from contextual analysis, design of strategies and policies, to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
5. Ensure appropriate finances are in place. Every government should invest in the nutrition of their people. In addition, donors should prioritise nutrition as both a maker and a marker of sustainable development.

NOTES

¹ UNICEF, WHO, World Bank Group, 2015. *Levels and trends in child malnutrition*. Joint child malnutrition estimates. http://www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/jme_brochure2015.pdf?ua=1

² From 159 million stunted children in 2014 to 129 million in 2030

³ UNICEF, WHO, World Bank. *Levels and trends in child malnutrition*. UNICEF-WHO-World Bank joint child malnutrition estimates. UNICEF, New York; WHO, Geneva; World Bank, Washington DC: 2015.

⁴ UNICEF, WHO, World Bank. *Levels and trends in child malnutrition*. UNICEF-WHO-World Bank joint child malnutrition estimates. UNICEF, New York; WHO, Geneva; World Bank, Washington DC: 2015.

⁵ Save the Children’s own research GRID database, based on the DHS

⁶ Data in this paragraph are from UNICEF cross-country analyses of household surveys, available at www.childinfo.org

⁷ The Scaling Up Nutrition, or SUN, movement unites governments, civil society, donors, businesses and others in a collective effort to improve nutrition.

⁸ Save the Children, 2011. *Why Law Matters?* Save the Children International. Available online: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Why_Law_Matters_1.pdf

⁹ Authors such as Vollmer, et al. (2014), Headey, D. and Chiu, A. (2011), Heltberg (2009) and Wang, X. and Taniguchi, K. (2002) are among many who argue that economic growth is necessary for reducing malnutrition, but is by itself insufficient. The same conclusion has been reached by the FAO (2012).

¹⁰ Save the Children, 2011. *Why Law Matters?* Save the Children International. Available online: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Why_Law_Matters_1.pdf

¹¹ On 1 April 2016 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed a UN Decade of Action on Nutrition that will run from 2016 to 2025.

Cover: Rebecca, 11, queues to receive food in South Sudan. Her family fled their home when conflict broke out in 2013. (Photo: Jonathan Hyams/Save the Children)

Every child has the right to a future. Save the Children works in the UK and around the world to give children a healthy start in life, the chance to learn and be safe. We do whatever it takes to get children the things they need – every day and in times of crisis.

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