

Call to Action: Nutrition in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Key Nutrition Messages

- Malnutrition is the underlying cause of nearly half of all child deaths. Addressing malnutrition will save lives, reduce inequalities, and build strong and resilient individuals, families, communities, and populations. Doing so will require dedicated action to improve nutrition in the 1,000-day window from pregnancy to age 2, as well as a multi-sectoral lifecycle approach. Leading scientists, economists, and health experts agree that improving nutrition during the critical 1,000-day window is one of the best and most cost-effective investments we can make to achieve lasting progress in global health and development.
- Increasing rates of exclusive breastfeeding is critically important to reducing preventable child deaths and ensuring long-term health, wellbeing, and productivity. Improving rates of breastfeeding requires better support and enabling environments for women to breastfeed.
- Gender discrimination is one of the fundamental drivers of malnutrition. Actions to end hunger and malnutrition must work to transform societal norms that result in girls eating last and least, keep girls out of school, limit women's income, voice and productivity, and lead to child marriage. Improving women's status and role, access to education, and access to and control over resources (i.e. land, income, agricultural inputs) will bring positive nutrition gains.
- Food security needs to be measured with indicators and targets that ensure action and accountability toward access to adequate nutritious food. Access to a range of diverse foods, reflected in dietary quality, is core to adequate food for all. Producing more diverse, nutritious foods is aligned with and supports the broader objectives of sustainability and resilience. Diversification is a resilience strategy for smallholders as it lowers their dependence on a single crop for income while increasing farm families' access to a range of foods and essential nutrients. Focusing on increasing nutritious food has co-benefits for climate, resilience, and gender.
- A human rights-based approach can effectively and sustainably tackle inequalities in food and nutrition security by increasing the focus on the right to food and targeting the most vulnerable segments of the population, as well as improving accountability and informed participation in decision making.

Though the world has halved the proportion of people who live in extreme poverty and has made substantial progress on other goals, ending hunger and malnutrition is an unfinished agenda. Malnutrition remains both the result of poverty and a cause of poverty. Today, the world is facing multiple burdens of malnutrition with populations suffering from stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight/obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Importantly, malnutrition in all its forms is predominantly concentrated among the poorest and most vulnerable in society, and has a particularly detrimental impact on women and children. Undernutrition is the single biggest cause of under-5 mortality, underlying nearly half of all child deaths; and overweight and obesity are rising rapidly, especially in lower- and middle-income countries.

Globally, 162 million children under 5 years of age are stunted. In addition, 52 million children suffer from wasting. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), globally 42 percent of pregnant women suffer from anemia, which is a risk factor for maternal deaths. Global rates of low birth weight, sub-optimal breastfeeding, and maternal anemia have remained relatively stagnant. Worldwide, obesity has nearly doubled since 1980. A staggering two billion people are overweight and obese, and at least 2.8 million people die every year from these conditions. Forty-four percent of the diabetes burden, 23 percent of the heart disease burden, and up to 41 percent of certain cancer burdens are attributable to overweight and obesity. Type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes mellitus are estimated to affect up to 15 percent of pregnant women worldwide, and pose significant life-threatening consequences to the health of the mother and the child in the short and long term. Meanwhile, the number of overweight children under 5 has doubled since 1990, reaching 43 million in 2013; rates of childhood overweight are expected to nearly double again by 2025.

Therefore, improving maternal and child nutrition should be a key priority in the global framework that will follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Good nutrition is not just an outcome of development, but also a driver of development and economic growth. It is a powerful equalizer. Addressing malnutrition will save lives, reduce inequalities, and build strong and resilient individuals, families, communities, and populations. Good nutrition is particularly important to the growth and development of infants and young children during the critical 1,000 days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday. In addition to scaling up nutrition-specific interventions, combatting malnutrition will also require strengthening national-level capacity; introducing a multi-sectoral approach to ensure nutrition-sensitive programming is included in a wide range of sectors, including health, agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene, social protection, education, and women's empowerment; and forging concrete action and systems linkages on many fronts.

Prioritizing Nutrition in the Post-2015 Framework

As the negotiations on the post-2015 agenda move to the intergovernmental level and become more technical, the nutrition community – represented by the *Road to Rio Global Nutrition Advocacy Working Group* – has developed a set of recommendations on goals, targets, and indicators. These recommendations build on existing global targets on maternal and child nutrition agreed upon at the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2012. The new post-2015 goals should aim to end hunger and reduce malnutrition in all its forms (stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiency, and obesity). Our recommendation includes three core elements:

- **Include standalone food and nutrition security goal:** The post-2015 framework should include a standalone food and nutrition security* goal that aims for food and nutrition security for all, with targets to reduce stunting to below 5 percent, end childhood deaths from wasting and reduce wasting rates further below the 2025 target, reduce childhood overweight, ensure all households – and especially children aged 6-23 months and women of reproductive age – have access to nutritious diets, and increase year-round availability of affordable, nutritious food groups adequate to meet food-based dietary recommendations.
- **Ensure nutrition-related targets and indicators within other goals:** Reducing stunting and wasting requires a multi-sectoral response targeted at the poorest and most vulnerable. Nutrition-related targets and indicators should be incorporated into other potential goals – including goals related to children’s health and mortality; women’s health and mortality; gender equality and women’s empowerment; water, sanitation, and hygiene; education; and governance.
- **Specify threshold goals and targets, including zero stunting and wasting:** There are enough country examples to suggest that with political will, the right mix of policies, and adequate resources, it is feasible to make dramatic improvements in maternal and child nutrition, end stunting and wasting, and increase rates of exclusive breastfeeding. The post-2015 framework is an opportunity to raise the level of ambition. Building on the WHA maternal and child nutrition targets, the post-2015 framework should prioritize the following outcomes:
 - Zero stunting and wasting;
 - Increasing exclusive breastfeeding for a child’s first 6 months up to at least 60 percent;
 - Reducing low birth weight to below 10 percent;
 - Reducing anemia for children under 5 and women of reproductive age to below 10 percent; and
 - Reducing rates of childhood overweight.

This brief was produced by the *Road to Rio Global Nutrition Advocacy Working Group* in consultation with the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Network and National Alliances and the NCD Alliance, as well as technical experts from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Food Policy Research Institute, WHO, the World Bank, the Institute for Development Studies, and others. This group has also developed a technical brief, which contains additional details on the recommendations above, including specific targets and indicators for both the standalone food and nutrition security goal, and goals related to children’s health and mortality; women’s health and mortality; gender equality and women’s empowerment; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; and governance.

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* Food and nutrition security occurs when “all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life.” *FAO, Coming to Terms with Terminology Rome, 2012.*