



# Malnutrition: Nigeria's Silent Crisis

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH, NIGERIA

## A call to action



- ◆ Throughout the years, Nigeria has undergone some remarkable changes: more children are surviving, the economy is growing, girls are better educated, and Nigerians are better connected with the help of mobile technology.

- ◆ Nigeria is a nation on the move!



- ◆ However, malnutrition remains a great challenge, particularly for mothers and children. It contributes to the deaths of about half a million children each year — or about 1 out of every 2 child deaths — and imposes a staggering cost to the nation.<sup>1</sup>

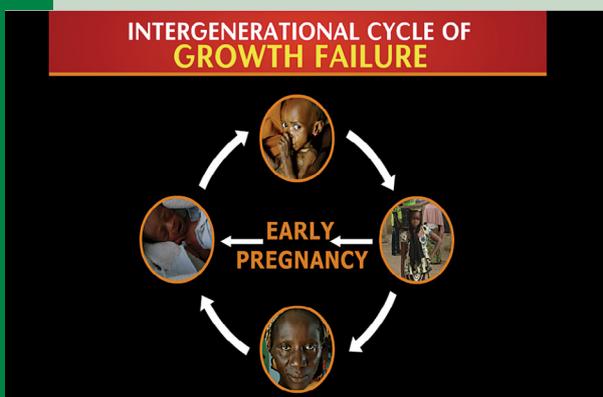
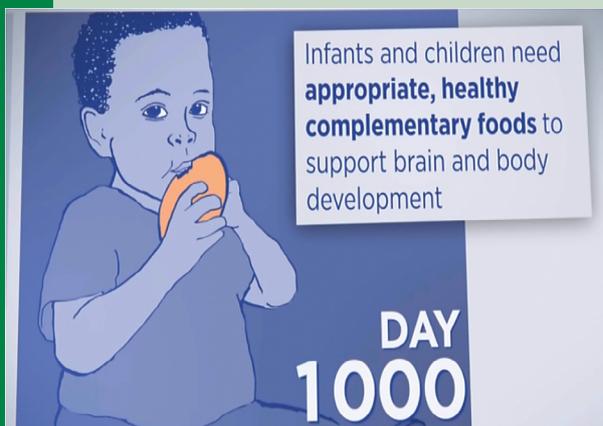
## NUTRITION IS A SMART INVESTMENT

Accelerates progress on key **global health** targets



- ◆ Research on nutrition interventions has demonstrated that nutrition is a smart investment.
- ◆ Investments in nutrition help children reach their full potential, accelerate progress on key global health targets, and advance economic development. Thus, nutrition interventions add value to other investments in health, education, and poverty reduction.<sup>2</sup>

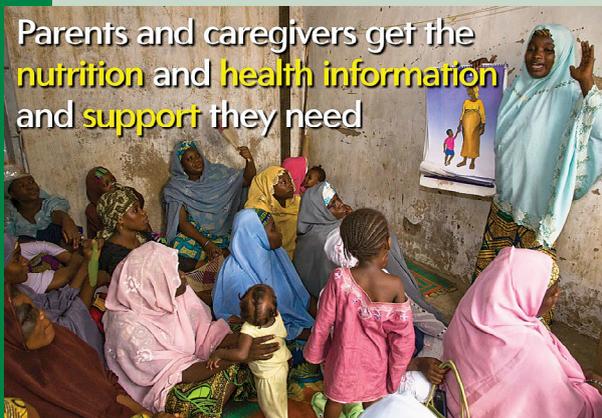
MALNUTRITION: NIGERIA'S SILENT CRISIS



- ◆ There is a 1,000 day window of opportunity during pregnancy and a child's first two years when nutrition investments are critical for giving a child the "best shot" in reaching his or her potential.<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ During pregnancy, a child's development is affected by the mother's intake of vitamins and micronutrients. For the first six months of life, exclusive breastfeeding is necessary. Afterward, at six months of age, the addition of nutritious semi-solid and solid foods, in the right quantity and the right variety, is crucial and extremely important to ensure the child grows correctly.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ The cost of malnutrition during this 1,000 day window is almost always irreversible. It can result in brain damage, growth and development problems, poorer educational performance, and an increased risk of developing chronic and potentially debilitating diseases.<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ Alarmingly, the effects of malnutrition are not necessarily visible. For instance, the two boys in the photo are the same age. However, the boy on the left suffers from underdevelopment and stunting due to malnutrition and may never reach his full height or his full potential.
- ◆ The intergenerational cycle of growth failure shows that malnutrition is cyclical and can be transferred from generation to generation.
- ◆ A malnourished woman is at greater risk of obstetric complications and delivering a low birth-weight baby. The baby shown here is at higher risk of illness, death, and delayed development, and will be more likely to suffer from growth failure during the early, critical years. She is likely to grow into a stunted or underweight woman, which brings us back to the beginning of the cycle. Adolescent pregnancy also heightens the risk of low birth-weight and makes it harder to break the cycle.<sup>6</sup>



Lack of **food** and **nutrition security**

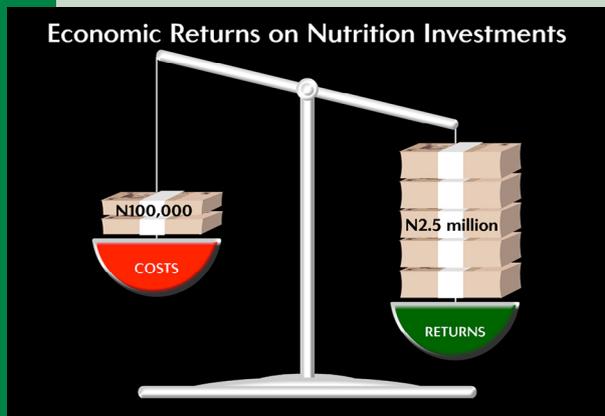


Parents and caregivers get the **nutrition** and **health information** and **support** they need

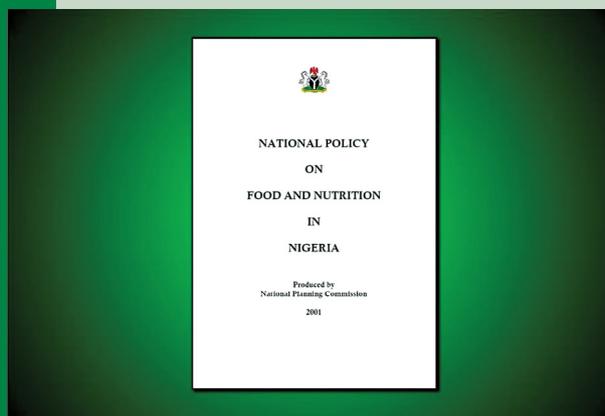


Bio-fortified crops:  
maize, sweet potatoes, cassava

- ◆ There are a number of factors that contribute to Nigeria's ongoing struggle with malnutrition:
  - Parents and caregivers are not well-informed about appropriate feeding practices. There is little understanding about the essential types and varieties of foods that children require to grow up healthy.
  - Food and nutrition insecurity is a harsh reality in Nigeria. Environmental degradation, low-nutrient crops, and high food prices limit access to food sources like protein and foods that are rich in vitamins and minerals, thus increasing poor nutrition outcomes among women, children, and families.
  
- ◆ Four basic, well-tested interventions that can help protect mothers and children are:
  - Ensuring they have access to essential vitamins, minerals, and nutrients.
  - Putting babies to the breast in the first half hour after birth and supporting exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life.
  - Giving children the right quantity and variety of foods from 6 months of age, and treating malnourished children with appropriate therapeutic foods.
  - Providing parents and caregivers with information on improved feeding practices and the support to practice them.<sup>7</sup>
  
- ◆ We can build on our long history of successes in nutrition, which include:
  - Being the first country in Africa to achieve universal salt iodization.
  - Establishing a mandate to ensure food products such as wheat flour, sugar, and vegetable oil are fortified with essential vitamins and minerals.
  - Fortifying crops such as beans, maize, sweet potatoes, and cassava with iron, zinc, and vitamin A.
  - Producing Ready-To-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTFs) to help children suffering from severe malnutrition.



- ◆ Investments in nutrition pay for themselves and produce a lifetime of benefits for individuals, families, and nations.
- ◆ Well-nourished children perform better in school. This can add at least 10 percent to their personal lifetime earnings and contribute to a more productive labour force — translating into an 11 percent annual GDP boost for the country.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ Key nutrition interventions also produce returns up to 25 times greater than the initial investment—for every N100, 000 spent, we would generate N2.5 million in economic returns.<sup>9</sup>



- ◆ We have unprecedented opportunities to scale up nutrition interventions. They include:
  - The current revision of our national policy on food and nutrition to identify goals and priority interventions, and improve coordination among key players in nutrition and food security.
  - Saving One Million Lives: an initiative with a nutrition-specific component that will expand interventions across the country.



- ◆ The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement aims to bring country and global leaders together to combat malnutrition.
- ◆ Nigeria has joined more than 45 countries from 4 continents, and over 100 international organisations and donors to mobilize broad commitment and advance the nutrition agenda.<sup>10</sup>

**Integrate** nutrition interventions into development strategies across all sectors



- ◆ **We ask you** to ensure that key nutrition interventions are integrated into development strategies across all sectors, including finance, planning, agriculture, education, women affairs and social development, environment, and water.

**Coordinate** efforts among different ministries and stakeholders



- ◆ **We ask you** to help coordinate programmes and policy efforts for nutrition among the different ministries and stakeholders. One important step is to support the National Committee on Food & Nutrition (NCFN) headed by the National Planning Commission to better ensure that all nutrition interventions support and reinforce one another.

**Mobilize additional resources and create explicit budget lines** for nutrition in health, agriculture, and state budgets



- ◆ **We ask you** to help mobilize more government funds for nutrition interventions. We need explicit budget line items devoted to nutrition in the health, agriculture, and state budgets.

# Malnutrition is a national problem...

## ...finding solutions must be a shared responsibility.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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